NATION

Ahead of R-Day, RDX used to blast Punjab rly track

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BUSINESS

Adani invests Rs 30K cr in Vizhinjam port

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SPORTS

Djokovic soars to 400 Grand Slam wins at AO

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K'taka has 10,365 transgenders, B'luru among top 5

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

A 2025-26 baseline survey report on gender minorities (transgender persons), submitted to the Karnataka government, has identified 10,365 transgender persons in the State.

The survey, prepared by the Department of Women and Child Development and the Karnataka State Women's Development Corporation, was conducted across 31 districts from 15 September, 2025, to understand the status of gender minorities, officials said on Saturday.

According to a statement issued by the office of Women and Child Development Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar, the survey identified 10,250 transgender persons above 18 years of age and 115 transgender children below 18 years, totalling 10,365 gender minorities in the state.

The objectives of the survey were to help gender minorities (transgender persons) overcome issues such as fear, humiliation, gender discrimination, social exclusion, depression, and suicidal tendencies, and to bring those who have faced harassment and social isolation back into the social mainstream, the statement added.

The top five districts with the highest number of gender minorities are: Vijayapura – 1,428, Chikkaballapur – 1,252, Bengaluru Urban – 757, Kolar – 638 and Belagavi – 618. "The baseline survey was conducted to collect accurate data to understand the status of gender minorities in the state, ensure their rehabilitation, and extend government welfare benefits. Based on the findings of this report, the government will initiate further action," it said. Some of the key recommendations include providing priority admission to gender minorities in residential hostels, strengthening access to healthcare, employment, and skill-development training. —*PTI*

The objectives of the survey were to help gender minorities **PHOTO: PTI**

SIR in Bengal done in hurry: Amartya Sen

KOLKATA, 24 JAN

Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has voiced deep unease over the SIR process in West Bengal, warning that the exercise is being conducted with "undue haste" and may jeopardise democratic participation, particularly with the assembly elections approaching in a few months. The economist, speaking to PTI from Boston, reflected on the democratic value of electoral roll revisions and the circumstances under which they can strengthen voting rights. —*PTI*

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CBSE schools must now have mental health counsellors

KOTA, 24 JAN

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has made the appointment of mental health and career counsellors mandatory in all its affiliated schools, aiming to address rising academic stress and improve career guidance. Following amendments to Clause 2.4.12 of the CBSE Affiliation Bye-Laws, 2018, notified on 19 January 2026, every school must now appoint one socio-emotional counsellor for every 500 students, with a degree in psychology or social work and CBSE-recognised training. Career counsellors are required for Classes 9 to 12 at the same ratio. For smaller schools, a hub-and-spoke model allows larger institutions to mentor nearby schools in providing counselling services. —*PTI*

Indian seafarers most abandoned in the world

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Indians were the most abandoned nationality of seafarers for the second consecutive year, with 1,125 cases recorded by the end of 2025, according to the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF). The UK-based global union said seafarer abandonment reached record levels worldwide last year, with 6,223 crew members abandoned across 410 ships. The ITF welcomed the Indian government's move to blacklist vessels involved in repeat abandonments and other malpractice to protect Indian seafarers. ITF Seafarers' Section Chair David Heindel described the situation as "a disgrace", saying seafarers continued to face severe violations of their human and labour rights due to unscrupulous ship owners. He called the crisis a systemic industry problem requiring collective action. —*PTI*

WEF: K'taka gets Rs 13,000 cr deals

RPSG to invest Rs 10K cr, Schneider Rs 1.5K cr

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

Karnataka has secured investment commitments worth Rs 13,070 crore following the World Economic Forum (WEF) meet in Davos, positioning the state as a key destination for global investments, Industries Minister MB Patil said on Saturday.

Patil said sectors attracting investment include aerospace, food processing, data centres, digital infrastructure, clean energy and advanced manufacturing. Over 45 meetings and consultations over five days highlighted Karnataka's strengths in artificial intelligence, Global Capability Centres (GCCs), research and sustainable urban development, he added.

"Global business leaders have praised the state's industry-friendly environment and

skilled workforce, reflecting the government's foresighted initiatives," he said. Patil outlined commitments from major firms: RPSG will invest Rs 10,500 crore in Vijayapura and Ballari, Carlsberg Rs 350 crore in a bottling plant at Nanjangudu, and Schneider Electric Rs 1,520 crore. INOX GFL will add Rs 400 crore to its wind tower and solar panel manufacturing, while Belrise Industries plans Rs 300 crore to expand its Mysuru unit.

Discussions were held with the Singapore Economic Development Board to establish a 'Singapore Park', and efforts are on to attract part of Coca-Cola's Rs 25,760 crore proposed investment. Interest was shown by Nokia, Vast Space, Crescent Enterprises, Voyager Technologies, Philip Morris, Mistral AI, Tech Mahindra, Bharti Enterprises, and Sify Technologies.

Patil also announced plans for 'KWIN City' near Bengaluru, a hub for research and innovation, attracting Imperial College and cybersecurity firm Cloudflare. —*PTI*

Gehlot submits report to Prez on walkout drama

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

Karnataka Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot has submitted a detailed report to President Droupadi Murmu on the controversy surrounding his customary address to the recent joint session of the state legislature, official sources said on Saturday.

The report covers developments on 22 January, when Gehlot cut short his address to three lines, and the previous day's meeting with a government delegation led by Law Minister HK Patil. Sources said the Governor consulted legal experts before submitting the report. Gehlot reportedly objected to around 10 paragraphs in the draft speech criticising the Centre, particularly references to the alleged repeal of the UPA-era MGNREGA and the VB-G RAM G Act, and suggested modifications, which the state government rejected. The report also details slogan-shouting and attempts by Congress legislators to gherao the Governor exit. —*PTI*

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SCOTLAND IN

ICC drops B'desh from T20 World Cup

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

The ICC has pushed Bangladesh out of the upcoming T20 World Cup, bringing in Scotland after the BCB refused to let its team travel to India, citing security concerns in the wake of Mustafizur Rahman's ouster from the IPL.

Scotland's entry ended the month-long suspense after the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) repeatedly insisted that their matches be shifted to Sri Lanka and even suggested that their group be swapped with Ireland. The Irish Cricket board however, categorically dismissed the suggestion.

At the ICC Board meeting, Bangladesh were taken to the cleaners with an overwhelming 14-2 verdict in favour of the 'Tigers' travelling to India for their games.

The ICC gave the BCB a 24-hour deadline to change its stance, but with Asif Nazrul being adamant, the cricket crazy nation's hopes of playing the T20 World Cup went up in smoke.

It has been learnt that top ICC officials, including chairman Jay Shah, were in Dubai on Friday and late evening an email was sent to BCB chairman Aminul Islam Bulbul informing him about the global body's decision.

The ICC also intimated to all the participating member nations separately about Bangladesh being dropped from the tournament. The implications of this unceremonious ouster will also badly hit BCB's coffers. The board will lose the USD 5, 00,000 participation fee that each nation gets. But the bigger potential loss will be ICC's annual revenue. The only option that exists with BCB is to move to the Court of Arbitration of Sports. —*PTI*

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US will lift tariffs on India: Don's aide hints

NEW YORK, 24 JAN

The US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has said there is a "path" to remove the 25 per cent tariffs imposed on India for buying Russian oil, noting that such purchases by Delhi from Moscow have "collapsed".

President Donald Trump has imposed 50 per cent tariffs on

India, including 25 per cent for its purchases of Russian oil, leading to a strain in the bilateral ties between the two countries. Bessent on Friday defined the sanctions imposed on India as a "success".

"We put 25 per cent tariffs on India for buying Russian oil. And the Indian purchases by their refineries of Russian oil have collapsed. So that is a success. The tariffs are still on. The 25 per cent Russian oil tariffs are still on," Bessent said in an interview with Politico.

"I would imagine that there is a path to take them off. So that's a check and a huge success," he added.

Bessent also criticised Europe for not imposing tariffs on India. "Our virtue-signalling European allies refused to do it (impose tariffs) because they wanted to sign this big trade deal with India," he said.

Bessent accused India of importing and refining more oil from Russia after the invasion of Ukraine. He also accused Europe of funding Russia's war by purchasing the oil refined in India.

DON THREATENS CANADA WITH 100% TARIFFS

President Donald Trump on Saturday threatened to impose a 100 per cent tariff on goods imported from Canada if America's northern neighbour went ahead with its trade deal with China. Trump said in a social media post that if Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney "thinks he is going to make Canada a Drop Off Port' for China to send goods and products into the United States, he is sorely mistaken." —*PTI*

Union Minister Jitin Prasada with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

EU FTA: Ursula Leyen lands in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen kick-started her four-day visit to India to firm up a series of big-ticket initiatives to significantly expand two-way ties.

President of the European Council Antonio Costa and von der Leyen will hold summit talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on 27 January amid increasing global concerns over disruptions caused by the Trump.

Costa will land in the national capital on Sunday. The two European Union leaders will grace the Republic Day celebrations as the chief guests. At the summit, India and the EU are set to announce the conclusion of the free trade agreement and firm up a strategic defence partnership pact. —*PTI*

Zubeen's family writes to PM seeking fast trial in case

GUWAHATI, 24 JAN

The family of popular Assam singer Zubeen Garg on Saturday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi requesting an expedited trial in connection with his death in Singapore last September.

The memorandum, signed by Garg's wife, sister and uncle, was emailed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging that no accused be granted bail until the judicial process concludes.

In the memorandum, the family said the singer-composer's death has left behind not merely a grieving family, but also millions of people seeking clarity and lawful action in the matter. "We have a sole objection now…Zubeen Garg has to receive real and complete justice. The guilty must get the most severe punishment," she

added. The family said the Assam Police's CID is investigating the case, while Singapore authorities are also conducting a parallel enquiry, with the family in continuous contact with officials in both jurisdictions.

Garg had died on 19 September while swimming in the sea in Singapore. A separate probe by Singapore authorities is underway, with a coroner's court ruling out foul play and saying Garg, who was severely intoxicated, drowned after refusing a life jacket. —*PTI*

PRIVACY A MYTH?

149 million Instagram, Gmail, Netflix passwords leaked

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Login credentials of more than 149 million online accounts, including those linked to Gmail, Facebook, Instagram and Netflix, have allegedly been leaked, according to a report published by ExpressVPN citing cybersecurity researcher Jeremiah Fowler.

The report claims the exposed data included 48 million Gmail accounts, 17 million Facebook, 6.5 million Instagram, 3.4 million Netflix, 4 million Yahoo and 1.5 million Outlook accounts, among others. Fowler said the database, totalling 96 GB, was publicly accessible and not protected by any password or encryption.

Fowler added that the records included emails, usernames, passwords and direct login URLs, allowing potential misuse by anyone who accessed the data.

The exposed information allegedly spanned a wide range of services, including financial platforms, crypto wallets, banking and credit card accounts. Fowler also flagged the presence of credentials linked to ".gov" domains from multiple countries, warning of possible national security and public safety risks.

"Even limited access to government-linked accounts could be exploited" he said. The exposure, Fowler warned, significantly increases the risk of credential-stuffing attacks, identity theft, financial fraud and highly targeted phishing campaigns. —*PTI*

Over 900 dogs culled in T'gana, claim activists

HYDERABAD, 24 JAN

In a fresh incident of alleged stray dog killings in Telangana, around 300 canines were reportedly killed in Jagtial district, taking the total toll to 900, animal rights activists claimed.

The killings are suspected to have been carried out by elected representatives, including Sarpanches, reportedly to fulfil promises made to villagers ahead of last December's gram panchayat elections, aimed at addressing the stray dog menace. A complaint lodged alleged that 300 stray dogs were poisoned in Pegadapally village on 22 January, with the Sarpanch and Gram Panchayat secretary accused of hiring individuals to carry out the act.

Police registered an FIR under relevant sections of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and the BNS Act. Inspector Ch. Kiran said that during an inquest, 70–80 carcasses were exhumed, buried three to four days prior.

Activists also claimed that 100 dogs were poisoned at Yacharam on 19 January, though only 50 carcasses were recovered. Earlier this month, police in Hanamkonda booked nine peoplefor allegedly killing 300 dogs, while in Kamareddy, six individuals, including, were booked over the deaths of 200 stray dogs. —*PTI*

Three injured while preparing for CM's event in Hubballi

HUBBALILI, 24 JAN

Three people were injured on Saturday after giant cut-outs erected for a Karnataka Slum Development Board house allotment programme collapsed on Mantur Road. The Congress party had installed large cutouts of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Minister Zameer Ahmed Khan and other leaders near the venue. The cutouts of Siddaramaiah and Khan reportedly broke and fell, injuring those standing beneath. The injured were shifted to a private hospital. One of them, Sharada Karyakatti, was hurt while accompanying her son to submit a housing application. *—Salar News*

Man attempts suicide in front of Vidhana Soudha

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

A man allegedly attempted suicide by consuming poison outside the Vidhana Soudha on Saturday, police said. The individual, Nagendrappa, an accused in a "moral policing" case at Soladevanhalli police station, is reported to be in stable condition, a senior officer added. The BJP criticised Karnataka's Congress government, alleging Nagendrappa was being harassed for exposing illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, which they claim led to the suicide attempt. In a post on X, the party questioned the government's failure to track and detain illegal migrants, adding, "Instead of deporting illegal immigrants, what justice is it to subject those identifying them to police torture?" It called on Home Minister G Parameshwara to intervene *—PTI*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.

YADUVEER ACCUSES CONG OF CORRUPTION

MYSURU, 24 JAN

Mysuru MP Yaduveer Wadiyar criticised the State government over alleged corruption in the Mysuru City Corporation (MCC), citing the suspension of three civic employees as evidence of a deepening crisis.

Speaking to reporters, he said the three women staff were suspended for allegedly misusing and siphoning off public welfare funds. Wadiyar claimed the incident highlighted the lack of accountability within the civic body.

He blamed the state government for the situation, pointing out that the absence of an elected council had left MCC affairs in the hands of officials acting "according to their whims and fancies". *—Salar*

Kharge accuses Centre of turning Guvs into 'puppets'

He said BJP asks governors to trouble govt in non-BJP states

HUBBALLI, 24 JAN

AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge with CM Siddaramaiah in Hubballi on Saturday ***PHOTO: PTI***

AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday accused the BJP-led Union government of using Governors as "puppets" to harass Congress-ruled and other non-BJP state governments, warning that continued BJP rule could lead to authoritarianism.

Addressing a large public gathering in Hubballi, Kharge alleged that the Prime Minister's Office and the Union Home Ministry were directly instructing Governors to obstruct elected state governments. "This is not limited to Karnataka. The same has happened in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Wherever there are Congress or non-BJP governments, Governors are creating trouble," he said.

Citing the recent Karnataka Assembly episode, Kharge referred to Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot's refusal to read the state-prepared address to a joint session of the legislature, concluding it in just three lines. He said Governors privately admit to receiving instructions from the "top", and accused the Centre of derailing federal democracy by withholding assent to Bills and delaying governance.

Kharge also criticised the Centre for allegedly weakening or repealing the UPA-era Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), claiming it curtailed people's right to work under Article 41 of the Constitution. He said Congress governments had enacted rights-based laws, while the Modi government was rolling them back. He vowed to fight for the restoration of MGNREGA, drawing parallels with the repeal of the three farm laws following protests.

Calling on voters to defeat the BJP in all upcoming elections, Kharge warned that failure to do so would endanger democracy. "No party is permanent, the country is permanent," he said, alleging that for the BJP, "RSS and BJP come first, then the country, Constitution and democracy".

He accused the BJP of doing little beyond criticising Congress leaders, and questioned the Centre's record on jobs, housing and welfare. "People need food, shelter and employment. What has the Modi government done?" he asked.

Kharge was speaking at an event marking the golden jubilee of the Slum Development Board, during which 42,345 houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana were dedicated and house allotment letters distributed. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and several state ministers were present. Kharge said welfare initiatives for the poor were possible only under Congress governments and urged people to support those committed to inclusive development. *—PTI*

545 POSTS HIT

ED attaches assets of IPS officer in police SI job 'scam'

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has attached assets of Karnataka IPS officer Amrit Paul, as well as a head constable, in a money laundering probe into alleged irregularities during recruitment for police sub-inspector (SI) in the State in 2021-22.

The scam is linked to the Karnataka Police recruitment drive for 545 sub-inspector posts. Following the tentative results, candidates getting published, there were allegations of corruption and irregularities in the examination process.

The ED alleged that Paul was central to the conspiracy. He reportedly gave Deputy SP Shanth Kumar unauthorised access to the strongroom, allowing accomplices like Sridhar H to tamper with the OMR answer sheets of certain candidates to guarantee their selection.

An order was issued on Friday under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to attach assets worth Rs 1.53 crore belonging to Paul and Sridhar. The accused collected "bribes" ranging from Rs 30 lakh to Rs 70 lakh per candidate, the agency said, adding that the illicit proceeds were utilised for the construction of residential properties.

Paul, a 1995-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer, was arrested by the Karnataka Crime Investigation Department (CID) in 2022 for his alleged involvement in irregularities regarding the Police Sub-Inspector (PSI) recruitment process. At the time of the alleged scam, he was serving as the Additional Director General of Police (ADGP), Recruitment. *—PTI*

PREP FOR R-DAY

Gorkha Rifles, Women CRPF, Dog Squad, Karnataka Women Police and other contingents participate in a full-dress rehearsal for the Republic Day Parade at Manekshaw Parade Grounds on Saturday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

HDK wants to return to K'taka politics, bring pro-people govt

HASSAN, 24 JAN

Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy on Saturday indicated his intention to return to state politics, saying he would devote more time to Karnataka to bring a "pro-people government" in the 2028 assembly elections in the state.

Kumaraswamy was speaking to reporters ahead of the JD(S) rally being held to mark the silver jubilee celebrations of the party here, in former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda's home district. He asserted that the people of the state wanted to remove the "corrupt" Congress government in Karnataka.

Targeting the ruling Congress party leaders in the state, Kumaraswamy asserted that no one can "finish off" JD(S), an ally of the BJP since the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

"I couldn't fulfil the unfinished tasks of H D Deve Gowda (his father) --especially to improve the livelihood of farmers-- during my short stint in power. It is my responsibility to play my role more in the state in the days ahead," Kumaraswamy said in response to a reporter's query.

He said Karnataka is a prosperous state. To put an end to several kinds of misuses that are happening in the state and to provide a peaceful life to the people here, there is a need for a pro-people government.

Hitting out at the ruling Congress government in the state, Kumaraswamy said, "There is an uncivilised government in the state. Everyday people are witnessing several kinds of corruption and illegal activities under this government. To remove this government, we want to send a message from Hassan," he said ahead of the party rally.

JD(S) still strong: Deve Gowda

Deve Gowda said the party remained "strong" and that the rally was a clear message to those who had written it off. Targeting the Congress he said the JD(S) continues to be a political force under Kumaraswamy. *—PTI*

WERE SHOOTING REELS

8 including 6 minors held for Ballari house fire

BALLARI, 24 JAN

Police have registered a case following a complaint of fire damage and missing items at a model house owned by the wife of former minister Janardhana Reddy, officials said on Saturday. The complaint was filed at the rural police station on Friday.

Eight people, including six juveniles, were taken into custody a day after the vacant house was gutted by fire. Ballari Superintendent of Police Suman Pennekar said the juveniles are students or school dropouts, while one suspect works at a fancy store. All are children of daily wage labourers and drivers.

According to police, the group had entered the abandoned house to shoot reels and take photographs. "They set some material on fire, which led to the blaze. We are not sure if there was any specific motive, and we are not ruling out any possibility," Pennekar said, adding that a detailed investigation was under way and evidence was being collected.

According to police, the group had entered the abandoned house to shoot reels and take photographs ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Addressing reports of missing items, the SP said no valuables were found at the site.

The house had been lying unused for several years, with broken glass panes, garbage inside and no security arrangements. There were no CCTV cameras or security staff deployed.

Meanwhile, BJP leader and Janardhana Reddy's brother, G Somashekar Reddy, alleged that supporters of Congress MLA Nara Bharath Reddy were responsible for setting the house on fire. Police have not confirmed the claim. Pennekar said property owners also bear responsibility for security, noting reports of illegal activities in layouts on the city's outskirts. She said night patrols and security measures would be intensified. *—Salar News*

Karnataka restricts food, clothing from pvt sources to prisoners

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

The Karnataka government has issued new regulations restricting the supply of food, clothing and bedding to civil and undertrial prisoners from private sources, citing security, staff shortage, overcrowding and health concerns.

A circular issued by the Prisons and Correctional Services Department on 23 January, under Section 30 of the Karnataka Prisons Act, 1963, bars cooked food from being brought into any prison, either at admission or during interviews. DGP Prisons Alok Kumar said on social media that the move ensures equal treatment for all undertrial prisoners, adding that FSSAI-certified prison food is of good quality.

Under the new rules, only limited uncooked or packaged items will be permitted after thorough checks. Allowed items include fresh fruits such as bananas, apples, mangoes and guava (up to 2 kg per person per week), dry fruits like almonds, cashews, walnuts and raisins (up to 0.5 kg), and bakery or snack items such as biscuits, cookies, namkeens and chips (up to 0.5 kg). Clothing from private sources is limited to two pairs of outerwear and two pairs of inner garments in addition to admission clothes, while bedding is already provided and no extra items are generally allowed, except one additional blanket on request.

The circular emphasises that all items are subject to security checks, and prohibited or suspicious items will be confiscated. The regulations are effective immediately and override any previous instructions or circulars regarding private supplies, ensuring uniformity across all prisons in the State. *—PTI*

Kochi court denies bail to organ trafficking accused

KOCHI, 24 JAN

A court on 19 January rejected the bail petition of Madhu Jayakumar, the prime accused in a case involving the trafficking of people to Iran and Tajikistan for organ transplantation. The NIA Special Court, noting that the investigation has extended overseas, said the case is at a critical stage. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) alleged Jayakumar was the kingpin of an international organ trafficking network, generating substantial sums later converted into crypto currencies. During interrogation, he reportedly disclosed the names of 27 recipients and 14 donors. The court warned he could influence victims or destroy evidence if released and highlighted the need to record his voice sample. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Priyanka demands loans waiver for Wayanad victims

WAYANAD, 24 JAN

Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has once again written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to waive loans taken by victims of the Mundakkai-Chooralmala disaster in Wayanad and convert central relief funds into grants. Following the July 2024 landslides, which claimed over 200 lives and destroyed hundreds of homes, Wayanad received no central assistance. Priyanka previously wrote in February 2025, calling post-disaster loans "unjust and inhumane," and sought waivers for jeep and auto rickshaw drivers, small traders, and homestay operators who lost livelihoods. While the central government cited legal restrictions under the National Disaster Management Act, the Kerala High Court observed Article 73 allows the Union government to grant such waivers. *—PTI*

Engineer Rashid granted custody parole for Parl

NEWDELHI, 24 JAN

A Delhi court on Saturday granted custody parole to jailed Lok Sabha MP Engineer Rashid, allowing him to attend the Budget Session of Parliament beginning 28 January. Under custody parole, prisoners are escorted by armed police during travel. Additional Sessions Judge Prashant Sharma approved the order, subject to conditions on travel costs and other restrictions. Rashid's counsel, Vikhyat Oberoi, said an appeal regarding travel expenses is pending before the Delhi High Court. Rashid, an Independent MP, has been in Tihar Jail since 2019 after his arrest by the National Investigation Agency under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in a 2017 terror-funding case. In 2024, he defeated Omar Abdullah by over 2 lakh votes in Baramullah. *—PTI*

Hyd top cop issues notice to BRS leader

HYDERABAD, 24 JAN

Hyderabad Police Commissioner VC Sajjanar has issued a notice to BRS leader and former IPS officer RS Praveen Kumar over his claim that seven criminal cases were filed against him. Praveen Kumar, referring to the SIT's questioning of BRS Working President KT Rama Rao in the alleged phone-tapping case, alleged that cases were registered against Sajjanar and other Andhra Pradesh police officers in 2015. These were linked to the cash-for-vote scandal involving Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, then a TDP MLA. In the notice on Friday, Sajjanar demanded Praveen Kumar furnish full details of the alleged cases within two days, warning that non-compliance could trigger civil and criminal action. *—PTI*

'Faced more hurdles than Anna, Jayalalithaa from Guv'

Stalin says Guv 'insulted' his position by not addressing Assembly

CHENNAI, 24 JAN

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Saturday said that due to Governor RN Ravi's actions during the Assembly speech, he has faced unprecedented challenges from the Raj Bhavan that were not witnessed during the tenures of former chief ministers CN Annadurai, M Karunanidhi and J Jayalalithaa.

Stalin claimed Ravi 'insulted' the gubernatorial position he holds by not reading out the speech at the commencement of the Assembly session.

Stating that he was constrained to criticise the Governor for his actions, the chief minister said many governors that Tamil Nadu has seen in the past were not like Ravi.

"I am facing the crisis that was not witnessed during the tenures of former chief ministers CN Annadurai, M Karunanidhi, MG Ramachandran and J Jayalalithaa...Governor (Ravi) is insulting the position he holds by not reading the speech at the start of the Assembly session and insisting upon playing the national anthem at the start of the Assembly session," the CM said in his reply to the motion of thanks to the Governor's address, in the Assembly.

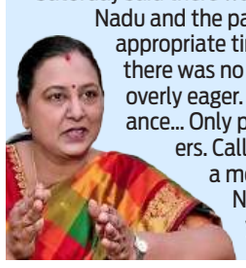
Chief Minister MK Stalin; TN Governor RN Ravi PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Governor Ravi declined to deliver the customary speech prepared by the state government on the first day of the current Assembly session on Tuesday, claiming there were "inaccuracies" in the text. Speaker Appavu had read out the Tamil version of the text.

As per the tradition of the Tamil Nadu Assembly, 'Tamil Thai Vazuthu' was sung before the Governor commenced his speech, and the National Anthem was sung at the conclusion of the speech, the he explained.

Those who want to change the constitutional dignity of a democratic nation with an authoritarian nature are anti-nationals in today's context, and people know pretty well who they are, he added. *—PTI*

Have enough time, will decide alliance later: DMDK's Premalatha



DMDK general secretary **Premalatha Vijayakanth** on Saturday said there was enough time for elections in Tamil Nadu and the party would forge an alliance at the appropriate time. Dismissing speculation, she said there was no hurry and blamed the media for being overly eager. "There is no delay in forming an alliance... Only press people are eager," she told reporters. Calling the DMDK "like a child", she said, "As a mother I know my responsibilities." On the NDA campaign, she said the alliance was yet to be finalised. *—PTI*

Stalin announces hikes in pension and retirement benefits for workers

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin announced increases in pensions and retirement benefits for noon meal organisers, Anganwadi workers, and panchayat secretaries. Pensions will rise to Rs 3,400 from Rs 2,000, and retirement benefits doubled to Rs 2 lakh. Family pensions for these workers will also increase. Additional benefits include enhanced pensions for mini Anganwadi workers and forest staff, and a new pension scheme for 1.80 lakh people via the "Stalin with You" camps, launching 4 February. The CM also announced plans for teachers' appointments and housing schemes. *—PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his virtual address at the 18th Rozgar Mela on Saturday PHOTO: PTI

Trade agreements creating opportunities for youth, says PM

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said India is entering into trade and mobility agreements with various nations to create new opportunities for the youths.

Modi made these remarks at the 18th Rozgar Mela where he handed over 61,000 appointment letters for various government jobs electronically. He addressed the job fair at 45 locations across the country via video conferencing.

Modi said India has the maximum number of youngsters in the world and his government was making efforts to create new opportunities for the youth within the country and abroad.

- Modi said India has the maximum number of youngsters in the world and his government was making efforts to create new opportunities for the youth within the country and abroad.

He urged the new appointees to join nation building and work to create a developed India.

Modi also urged the youth to work with the motto 'Nagrik Devo Bhava' (citizen is akin to God) while discharging their duties.

The government has made unprecedented investments in modern infrastructure, leading to increased employment across construction-related sectors. India's startup ecosystem was expanding rapidly, with nearly two lakh registered startups employing over 21 lakh youth, he said.

Modi said 'Digital India' has expanded a new economy, with India emerging as a global hub in animation, digital media, and several other sectors.

The 18th Rozgar Mela was organised at 45 locations across the country and newly recruited candidates joined various ministries and departments of the government. *—PTI*

Congress needs its own 'Board of Peace', says BJP

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

The Congress needs to set up a "Board of Peace" to bring its house in order, the BJP said on Saturday in a swipe over the alleged "infighting" in its state units.

The BJP cited reports of "internal rift" within the Congress in Jharkhand after being plagued by factionalism in states like Karnataka, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh.

Five "disgruntled" Congress MLAs from Jharkhand met party president Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday and demanded a review of the ministerial berths allotted to the party amid an "internal rift" within the party's state unit, BJP spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla said in a post on X.

The MLAs placed their grievances before Kharge, alleging that the Congress ministers in the state were not performing well, he said.

"After Tharoor vs Congress in Kerala, now it is Congress vs Congress in Jharkhand," he added.

US President Donald Trump recently unveiled his "Board of Peace" to bring peace to Gaza and possibly resolve other global conflicts. *—PTI*

SIT blamed for Sabarimala accused getting bail

T'PURAM, 24 JAN

Leader of Opposition **VD Satheesan** on Saturday claimed that the SIT created a situation where accused in the Sabarimala gold loss cases were able to get statutory bailas it has not even filed an interim chargesheet to date. Speaking to reporters, he said that as arrested accused come out on bail, they could tamper with evidence, especially when the allegedly misappropriated gold has not yet been recovered. He alleged pressure from the Chief Minister's office delayed the chargesheet. Referring to the release of former TDB administrative officer B Murari Babu and bail to prime accused Unnikrishnan Potty in one case, he said Potty could get relief in the other case too once the mandatory period expires.

- Satheesan siad that as the arrested accused come out on bail they could tamper with evidence, especially when the gold has not yet been found.

"Creating a situation where the accused can get statutory bail was not at all correct," he said. Satheesan called LDF ministers' remarks against Sonia Gandhi "nonsense" and said even the Chief Minister had taken photos with Potty.

Congress general secretary KC Venugopal alleged that the Kerala government was trying to "paralyse" the SIT investigation. *—PTI*

'WILL ATTEND PARTY ACTIVITIES'

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor PHOTO: ANI

Have issues with party, will discuss with leaders: Tharoor

KOZHIKODE, 24 JAN

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor on Saturday said he has some "issues" with the party which he would take up with the leadership. He never violated the organisation's positions in the Parliament, he said.

His remarks come amid reports that Tharoor is upset over Congress leader Rahul Gandhi not adequately acknowledging his presence at a recent event in Kochi and over alleged repeated attempts by state party leaders to sideline him.

The Thiruvananthapuram MP had informed the Congress leadership about his inability to attend a party meeting.

He said that some reports about him might be true, while others could be false.

Tharoor explained that he wanted to attend a literature festival and that continuous travel was difficult.

"I will certainly attend all party activities in Parliament and meet the party leadership," he said.

Earlier Tharoor said he had taken a strong stand on Operation Sindoor and remained "unapologetic," about it.

He said that as an observer, commentator and writer, he had written a newspaper column after the Pahalgam terror attack, stating that it should not go unpunished and that there should be a kinetic response.

He said that while India is focused on development, a prolonged conflict with Pakistan should be avoided and that any action should be limited to targeting terrorist camps.

When the government sent him abroad as part of a multi-party delegation over Operation Sindoor, his party did not like it. *—PTI*

Ajit will return to MVA, NCPs will unite: Raut

MUMBAI, 24 JAN

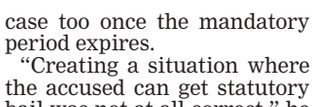
Shiv Sena (UBT) leader **Sanjay Raut** on Saturday claimed that the two factions of the NCP will come together and Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar will return to the Maha Vikas Aghadi, as his heart is with his family.

Speaking to reporters, Raut claimed that the ruling NCP has merged with Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP) as both are contesting on the 'clock' poll symbol in the upcoming Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samiti elections in the state.

Ajit Pawar joined the Shinde government along with eight MLAs in July 2024, resulting in a split in the NCP.

The faction led by him got the party name and 'clock' symbol, while Sharad Pawar's outfit is now called NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar).

The NCP factions had forged an alliance for the municipal polls in Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad and have announced a tie-up for the third phase of civic body polls scheduled for 5 February. *—PTI*



BJP fell short of majority in Sangli local body polls

As the BJP fell short of a majority in Sangli and Akola municipal corporations, the Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP) emerged as a key factor with three seats each. In Sangli, the BJP won 39 seats, Congress 18, Ajit Pawar's NCP 16, Shiv Sena two and NCP (SP) three, while in Akola the BJP secured 38 seats amid fragmented results. Meanwhile, Congress has resolved an internal dispute linked to CMC after a meeting of leaders, state legislature party leader Vijay Wadettiwar said. *—PTI*

PM's Kerala visit: BJP fined Rs 19.7 L for illegal banners

T'PURAM, 24 JAN

The BJP-ruled Thiruvananthapuram Corporation has imposed a fine on the party and lodged a police case over the installation of flex boards on city footpaths. Based on a complaint filed by the corporation's secretary, the police registered a case against BJP district president Karamana Jayan.

The FIR states that violating multiple orders of the Kerala High Court and directions issued by the Local Self Government Department, the BJP district committee installed flex boards on footpaths as part of the Prime Minister Modi's visit, causing public inconvenience.

Modi arrived in Thiruvananthapuram on Friday and launched several development projects, flagged off four trains in Kerala and also addressed a public gathering of party workers and supporters. Police officials said an investigation will be initiated following the registration of the FIR.

The Thiruvananthapuram Corporation has also imposed a fine of Rs 19.7 lakh on the BJP district leadership.

Officials at the Corporation secretary's office said directions were issued to BJP leaders to remove the illegally installed flex boards, but no action was taken.

The fine was imposed after a detailed assessment.

Meanwhile, former DGP and newly elected Sastham -angalam councillor R Sreelekha said that she had kept her distance from Modi on-stage at the public meeting due to her years of training and discipline not to approach a VVIP unless invited to do so.

The state BJP vice-president's explanation came amid reports of her dissatisfaction for not being appointed as the Mayor of the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation. *—PTI*

AROUND 1.26 CR VOTERS UNMAPPED

ECI meeting SC deadline on WB voters' list doubtful

KOLKATA, 24 JAN

The Election Commission is facing uncertainty in complying with the Supreme Court's directive to publish the list of voters with data discrepancies by Saturday, as Booth Level Officers (BLOs) did not receive the needed software in time, an official said.

On 19 January, the SC directed the EC to display the names of those on the "logical discrepancies" list and "unmapped" voters at panchayat and block offices.

"We did not get the software till Friday night. Even if the software reaches us, it will be extremely difficult to download, print and display such a huge volume of data within a few hours," an official at the West Bengal CEO office said.

- On 19 January, the SC directed the EC to display the names of those on the "logical discrepancies" list and "unmapped" voters at panchayat and block offices. However, an official at the WB CEO office said they did not get the software till Friday night.

The list will include names having data discrepancies as well as "unmapped" voters, totalling around 1.26 crore.

Meanwhile, around 3 lakh voters categorised as "unmapped" failed to appear for hearings.

The hearings are scheduled to conclude on 7 February, while the final electoral roll is slated to be published on 14 February. The EC has indicated that the deadline may be extended.

Meanwhile, Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav questioned the SIR in UP, alleging irregularities.

Citing discrepancies in the Kannauj Sadar Assembly constituency, which is in his Lok Sabha seat, Yadav said, "If this is the situation in one constituency, one can imagine what is happening across the state." *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Nabrangpur district in Odisha now 'Naxal-free'

BHUBANESWAR, 24 JAN

Odisha's Nabrangpur district has been declared "Naxal-free" after nine Maoists surrendered in neighbouring Chhattisgarh, police said Saturday. Seven women were among those who surrendered, carrying a bounty of Rs 47 lakh. They operated in Nabarangpur and Dhamtari district, Chhattisgarh. "With their surrender, Nabarangpur district has become free from Naxal activity," police stated. The district had seen incidents of violence, including the killing of BJD MLA Jagabandhu Majhi in 2011 and an attack on the Kundei police station in 2010. The influence of Maoists now exists only in seven districts. —*PTI*

70-foot, decades old steel bridge stolen in Korba

KORBA, 24 JAN

A 70-foot, 10-tonne steel bridge built over four decades ago was stolen overnight in Korba, Chhattisgarh, leaving residents stunned. Investigators identified 15 suspects, with five arrested so far. The theft was reported on 18 Jan after the bridge, used as a pedestrian pathway, vanished. "Unidentified accused used gas cutters to cut the iron railings," said Korba Additional SP Lakhan Patle. The arrested confessed to stealing the steel for scrap, with police seizing seven tonnes of hidden steel and the transport vehicle. —*PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Actress Mouni Roy alleges harassment by elderly men

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Actress Mouni Roy shared a social media post alleging harassment during a recent event in Karnal, Haryana. She claimed some elderly men attempted to touch her and made lewd gestures. "As the event started, uncles and family members put their hands on my waist for photos...I said 'sir please remove your hand,'" she wrote. Roy added that during her performance, some men made lewd remarks and gestures, and threw owing roses at her. She described the incident as humiliating and urged authorities to act against such behaviour. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Temperatures plunge again in New Delhi

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Delhi on Saturday witnessed a sharp drop in temperatures and a slight improvement in air quality after rain a day ago. The IMD'S Safdarjung station recorded a minimum temperature of 7.6 degrees Celsius, 0.1 degrees above the season's normal, marking a sharp fall from Friday's low of 13.7 degrees Celsius, which was the highest in four years. Air quality saw a slight improvement on Saturday morning, with the average Air Quality Index (AQI) settling at 256, in the 'poor' category, against 293 on Friday, according to the Central Pollution Control Board's (CPCB) Sameer app. —*PTI*

Ahead of R-Day, RDX used to blast Punjab rly track

No loss of life or major damage to railway line, says DIG

CHANDIGARH, 24 JAN

A minor blast blew off part of a railway track near Sirhind station in Punjab's Fatehgarh Sahib district and injured the loco pilot of a freight train. The train's loco was also damaged, police said on Saturday.

The incident took place at around 9.50 pm on Friday when the freight train was passing through Khanpur village, located 4 to 5 km away from Sirhind, a Government Railway Police official said. It was a dedicated track for freight trains.

Deputy Inspector General of Police (Ropar Range) Nanak Singh, who visited the site, said, "Last night, we received information that a minor blast took place here. Investigation teams have arrived here. We are also in touch with other agencies, which have sent their specialised teams."

The DIG said that there was no loss of life or major loss of property.

"The loco pilot suffered a minor cut on his cheek. He is out of danger," Singh said, adding that there was no major damage to the loco.He said there was no major damage to the track as well, and it will soon be restored.

When asked about the nature of the blast, Singh said the investigation was at a preliminary stage. Asked if there was a terror angle, Singh said it was premature to say.

Meanwhile, the blast caused panic in the nearby village of Khanpur.

A villager said he heard the explosion on Friday night. "It was a loud sound, which was heard throughout the village," he said. — *PTI*

Ropar Range DIG Nanak Singh and other police officials at the RDX blast site at Sirhind in Fatehgarh Sahib district, on Saturday **PHOTO: ANI**

Punjab police bust terror modules, arrests 5 BKI men

Punjab Police busted two terror modules on Friday with the arrest of five operatives of the BKI and the seizure of a huge cache of arms and ammunition. The State Special Operations Cell (SSOC) averted an attack with the arrest of a Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) operative Sharanpreet Singh, DGP Gaurav Yadav said. A P-86 grenade, one 9 mm Glock pistol, five live cartridges and 65 grams of ICE (Methamphetamine) were seized from him. Yadav said that the Hoshiarpur police arrested five BKI operatives and seized an "RDX-based" IED. — PTI

OVER 24 ILL

Residents queue up for water supply on Saturday in Indore **PHOTO: PTI**

Water contamination: Indore admin deploys survey teams

INDORE, 24 JAN

The Indore administration has deployed 12 survey teams and established two temporary hospitals to treat people who have fallen ill due to water contamination in Mhow, officials said on Saturday. At least 12 suspected cases of people suffering from stomach infection were detected in the Patti Bazaar area of Mhow on Friday. Locals have, however, claimed that around 24 people have fallen ill after consuming contaminated water.

The administration has been taking proactive measures, as the latest cases have come after the deaths of seven people in the Bhagirathpura area last month. As per the instructions of Collector Shivam Verma, 12 teams were deployed in Patti Bazaar on Friday, and they have surveyed around 80 households.

Two temporary hospitals have been set up in the affected area, it stated. At least 12 suspected patients have been identified, and they are undergoing treatment. Eight patients are undergoing treatment at a hospital, while two were discharged.

Chief Medical and Health Officer (CMHO) Dr Madhav Prasad said that blood and water samples are being collected in the Patti Bazaar area.

Public announcement systems are being used to inform residents about precautions. The administration has also been distributing ORS, glucose, zinc, and chlorine tablets, it added. — *PTI*

Noida gets new CEO after techie drowns

NOIDA, 24 JAN

Senior IAS officer Krishna Karunesh has been appointed as the new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Noida Authority, replacing Lokesh M officials said, on Saturday. A senior Noida Authority confirmed the new appointment to PTI.

Originally from Bihar, Karunesh—a 2011-batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer—was serving as the District Magistrate of Gorakhpur prior to his new appointment. He has previously held key administrative roles, including Chief Development Officer of Ghaziabad and Vice Chairman of the Ghaziabad Development Authority. — *PTI*

CYBER CRIME

SC fiat to Centre, RBI after man loses Rs 23 cr via digital arrest

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

The Supreme Court has sought responses from the Centre, the CBI and others on a plea filed by a 78-year-old retired banker who was duped of Rs 23 crore after allegedly being put under "digital arrest" for nearly a month.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi has issued notices to the Centre, the CBI, the RBI and others on the plea filed by Naresh Malhotra.

The plea has sought directions to the banks involved to deposit the defrauded amount of Rs 22.92 crore in the petitioner's accounts.

Malhotra has made the Kotak Mahindra Bank, HDFC Bank, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank, Indus Ind Bank, City Union Bank and Yes Bank parties to the case.

- In his plea in the Supreme Court, former banker Naresh Malhotra has sought directions to the banks involved to deposit the defrauded amount of Rs 22.92 crore back in his accounts

The accused told the victim that his Aadhaar card was involved in narcotics trafficking, terror funding and the Pulwama terror attack, and confined him to his flat, an officer said.

Police said the victim stated in his complaint that the ordeal began on 4 August 2025, when he received a call from a man claiming to be a Mumbai police officer. The caller accused him of being linked to a drug racket. Subsequently, fraudsters impersonating ED and CBI officials also contacted him.

Later, Malhotra filed a complaint with on the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP) on 19 September 2025, and the matter was transferred to the Intelligence Fusion and Strategic Operations (IFSO) unit.

Police had said an FIR was registered and Rs 12.11 crore of the extorted money was were frozen. — *PTI*

ACTOR KAMAL KHAN HELD IN FIRING CASE

MUMBAI, 24 JAN

Actor Kamal Rashid Khan, popularly known as KRK, was arrested on Saturday in connection with a firing incident at a residential building, police said.

Khan was brought to the Oshiwara police station for questioning on Friday night, and the actor admitted to firing two rounds using his licensed firearm. Two bullets were fired at the Nalanda Housing Society in Andheri on 18 January. Two bullets were found on the society premises. One of the flats belongs to a writer-director, while a model owns the other one.

A forensic analysis indicated that the bullets may have been fired from Khan's house. The motive is not known, he said. — *PTI*

Mamkootathil's bail plea verdict on 28 Jan

PATHANAMTHITTA, 24 JAN

The District and Sessions Court of Pathanamthitta reserved its verdict on Saturday in the bail application of Palakkad MLA Rahul Mamkootathil in the third rape case filed against him.

Sessions Judge N. Harikumar posted the case to 28 January for orders. When the matter came up for consideration, the prosecution opposed the bail plea. The prosecutor submitted that the current stage of the investigation was crucial. He also argued that there was every chance of the accused influencing witnesses. The court had earlier heard arguments of senior advocate Ajithkumar who appeared for Mamkootathil.

The present complaint against Mamkootathil was filed by an NRI, who alleged that the rape took place in 2024 in a hotel in Thiruvalla.

She alleged that Mamkootathil befriended her on social media and later, 'forced' her to book a hotel room where he 'raped her. She also stated that she became pregnant and suffered a miscarriage later. — *PTI*

Man owns up Delhi cafe murder in video

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

The man accused of shooting a 24-year-old dead at a cafe in northeast Delhi posted a video on social media hours after the incident, confessing to the crime and cited a grudge over a slap, police said on Saturday.

The shooting took place on Friday at a cafe in the Maujpur area, where the victim, Faizan alias Fazzi, 24, was shot and later declared dead at the Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital.

In a video uploaded from the social media handle 'moinqureshiii_' shortly after the incident, the accused claimed responsibility for the killing and said he had shot Faizan as he had slapped him a few months ago.

In the video, the accused said that his family had no role and that there were no financial disputes behind the murder.

The murdered Faizan alais Fazzi (left) and his 'killer' **PHOTO: INSTAGRAM**

"I killed Faizan due to a personal grudge. My father had no role in this. My family or friends also have nothing to do with it. There was no money involved. He slapped me four months ago," he said in the video.

Police said the video and the claims made in it are being verified.

Police said, Faizan, a resident of Welcome, was injured mortally in the head and chest.

- The victim's family alleged that the murder was linked to a financial dispute. Faizan's brother, Salman, claimed that his brother had lent around Rs 40,000 to the accused and that there had been altercations over repayment

The cafe, which was running illegally, was sealed, officials said.

The victim's family alleged that the murder was linked to a financial dispute. Faizan's brother, Salman, claimed that his brother had lent around Rs 40,000 to the accused and that there had been earlier altercations over repayment. — *PTI*

DECISION AFTER HC CASE

Gujarat varsity cancels chemistry prof's posting as English HoD

AHMEDABAD, 24 JAN

After facing heat over the appointment of a chemistry professor as the head of the English department and sparking litigations in the Gujarat High Court, a public university in Patan district has reversed its decision.

The Hemchandracharya North Gujarat University on Friday informed Justice Nirzar Desai that it is ready to appoint a person from the same branch and subject as the English department head.

The university courted controversy after it appointed Kokilaben Parmar, a chemistry professor, as the in-charge HoD of the English department following the retirement of Adesh Pal.

The appointment was challenged by another English professor, Hetal Patel, in the Education Tribunal.

The university defended its decision, citing that the seniority of the members in the English department was not ascertained, and the in-charge HoD had only administrative responsibility.

However, the tribunal, in an interim order dated 10 October 2025, stayed the university's decision and barred Parmar from the English department.

Parmar challenged the tribunal's order in the high court, stating that she was not heard.

Considering her plea, the HC, in its order dated 16 October, stayed the tribunal's ad-interim relief and endorsed Parmar's appointment.

The university on Friday submitted that it was ready to appoint a person from the same department as the in-charge HoD, and the court allowed the decision. — *PTI*

The Hemchandracharya North Gujarat University **PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA**

Satyarthi bats for regulation of social media

HYDERABAD, 24 JAN

Nobel Peace Laureate Kailash Satyarthi on Saturday favoured regulation of social media, including access to minors, to reduce its negative impact, although it can help in spreading moral values.

Satyarthi's comments came against the backdrop of Australia banning social media for Under-16s.

"I think social media must definitely be regulated and not banned, although a lot of hatred is being propagated through social media," Satyarthi said.

In India, the Andhra government has appointed a committee to explore, among others, the possibility of restricting or banning children below 16 from accessing online platforms.

Australia became the first country to ban social media for children under 16 on 10 December 2025. — *PTI*

Passenger tax on those coming to Jaisalmer

JAIPUR, 24 JAN

The municipal council of Rajasthan's desert city, Jaisalmer, has decided to levy a passenger tax on all vehicles entering the city. Tourists arriving in private vehicles or taxis will have to pay the tax at designated entry points.

The move has received approval from the state's Local Self-Government Department, according to an official. Toll checkpoints will be set up on Barmer Road and Jodhpur Road, and the tax will be collected as vehicles enter the city limits.

The rates are fixed at Rs 200 for a 35-seater bus, Rs 150 for a 25-seater bus, Rs 100 for a five-seater car, and Rs 50 for taxis and other cars, the official said. The council is also planning to digitise the tax collection system.

Jailsalmer Municipal Commissioner Lajpal Singh Sodha said the tax is aimed at improving civic services and managing heavy tourist traffic during the peak season.

The tax will take effect after the gazette notification is issued and will be levied in addition to entry fees at major tourist sites. — *PTI*

WB SIR done in haste, may risk voter participation: Sen

Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has voiced deep unease over the SIR process in West Bengal, warning that the exercise is being conducted with "undue haste" and may jeopardise democratic participation, particularly with the assembly elections approaching in a few months.

The economist, speaking to PTI from Boston, reflected on the democratic value of electoral roll revisions and the circumstances under which they can strengthen voting rights.

He stressed that such an exercise must be conducted with care and adequate time, which he believes are "missing" in Bengal's case.

"A thorough review of electoral rolls done carefully with adequate time can be a good democratic procedure, but this is not what is happening in West Bengal at this time," Sen said.

"The SIR is being done in a hurry, with inadequate time for people with voting rights to have sufficient opportunity to submit documents to vindicate their entitlement to vote in the coming assembly elections. This is both unjust to the electorate and unfair to Indian democracy," he said.

Speaking of his experience during the special intensive revision in Bengal, Sen said time pressure was evident even among poll officials.

"Sometimes, the officials of the Election Commission (EC) themselves seem to lack enough time.

"When they questioned my right to vote from my home constituency in Santiniketan – from where I have voted earlier, and where my name, address and other details are registered in official records – they questioned me about my deceased mother's age at my date of birth, even though, as a voter herself, my mother's details, like mine, were stored also in their own official records," he said.

The celebrated economist described the documentation challenges he encountered, noting that these difficulties are common for many Indians born in rural areas.

"Like many Indian citizens born in rural India (I was born in the then village of Santiniketan), I do not have a birth certificate, and my eligibility to vote required further paperwork to be presented on my behalf," he said.

Although the issue was eventually resolved, Sen expressed concern for citizens who lack similar assistance.

"Even though I could happily say (like the Beatles) – 'Oh, I get by with a little help from my friends' – I worried about others who do not have so many loyal friends. My friends helped me to get through the rigid gates of the formidable EC," he said.

Nobel laureate and philosopher Amartya Sen said time pressure was evident even among the poll officials **PHOTO: PTI**

- The Nobel laureate and economist Amartya Sen, speaking to PTI from Boston, reflected on the democratic value of electoral roll revisions and the circumstances under which they can strengthen voting rights. He stressed that such an exercise must be conducted with care and adequate time, which he believes are "missing" in Bengal's case.

Sen was summoned for a hearing after a "logical discrepancy" was flagged over an age difference between him and his mother.

Asked whether the SIR could give advantage to any party in Bengal, Sen said he could not offer a definitive assessment.

"I am not an election expert, so I cannot answer the question with certainty. I have been told by those who seem to know more, that the BJP will benefit from the under-accounting.

"I don't know whether that is true, but the real point is that the EC should not insist on a faulty arrangement and force our proud democracy to commit an unnecessary error, no matter who benefits," he said.

On sections most vulnerable to being excluded during the SIR, Sen pointed to the structural disadvantages faced by the poor.

"An obvious answer must be the underprivileged and the poor. The documents needed for being allowed into the new electoral roll are often difficult to obtain for the underdogs of society.

"The class bias that may show up in the necessary requirement of getting and showing particular documents in order to qualify to enter the new voters' list will tend to work against the indigent," Sen said.

He also flagged concerns about the broader climate in which voting rights are exercised.

"Another possibility to look into may relate to the difficulties that minority communities sometimes face in getting their rights, including voting rights, respected. Indian Muslims are sometimes relegated to disadvantaged positions through the activism of the recently bolstered Hindutva extremists. Some categories of Hindus also may face discrimination and targeting."

Sen underscored the need for vigilance at the highest levels.

"The EC and the Supreme Court must make sure that no adult Indian citizen has difficulty to qualify for voting," he said.

Sen said he remains keen to cast his vote in the upcoming assembly polls, subject to practical constraints.

"I would very much like to do that. It depends, however, on the exact date on which my constituency's voting is fixed." He explained that his professional commitments abroad often require careful coordination.

"As a Professor at Harvard University, I have duties I cannot escape at Cambridge, Massachusetts, and as a Former Master of Trinity College in Cambridge, England, I have other duties there," Sen said.

He also recalled an earlier instance that demonstrated his commitment to voting.

"I have to try to carry out all my obligations, including casting my vote in Santiniketan. On one previous occasion, I had to travel rapidly from Cambridge to London, to Delhi, to Kolkata, to Santiniketan, to Kolkata, to Delhi, to London, to Cambridge, all within 48 hours."

Reflecting on age, Sen concluded on a contemplative note.

"But I am 92 now – a little more elderly. I was then only around 82 years in age. During the journey, I could re-read an old book of Rabindranath where he explained why he was proud to be a product of three cultures – Hindu, Muslim and European. I hope to be able to think about Tagore's explanation this time also – if I manage to do what I should, if I could," he said. *—PTI*

People wait in long queues to complete their hearing for Special Intensive Revision in Bengal **PHOTO: PTI**

SALAR

ChatGPT to now have ads, sparking privacy concerns

Large-scale AI is extremely expensive. Training and running advanced models require vast data centres, specialised chips, and constant engineering **PHOTO: PTI**

OpenAI has announced plans to introduce advertising in ChatGPT in the US. Ads will appear on the free version and the low-cost Go tier, but not for Pro, Business, or Enterprise subscribers.

The company says ads will be clearly separated from chatbot responses and will not influence outputs. It has also pledged not to sell user conversations, to let users turn off personalised ads, and to avoid ads for users under 18 or around sensitive topics such as health and politics.

Still, the move has raised concerns among some users. The key question is whether OpenAI's voluntary safeguards will hold once advertising becomes central to its business.

WHY ADS IN AI WERE ALWAYS LIKELY

We've seen this before. 15 years ago, social media platforms struggled to turn vast audiences into profit.

The breakthrough came with targeted advertising: tailoring ads to what users search for, click on, and pay attention to. This model became the dominant revenue source for Google and Facebook, reshaping their services so they maximised user engagement.

Large-scale artificial intelligence (AI) is extremely expensive. Training and running advanced models require vast data centres, specialised chips, and constant engineering. Despite rapid user growth, many AI firms still operate at a loss. OpenAI alone expects to burn USD 115 billion over the next five years.

Only a few companies can absorb these costs. For most AI providers, a scalable revenue model is urgent and targeted advertising is the obvious answer. It remains the most reliable way to profit from large audiences.

HISTORY ON OPENAI'S PROMISES

OpenAI says it will keep ads separate from answers and protect user privacy. These assurances may sound comforting, but, for now, they rest on vague and easily reinterpreted commitments.

The firm proposes not to show ads "near sensitive or regulated topics like health, mental health or politics", yet offers little clarity about what counts as "sensitive," how broadly "health" will be defined, or who decides where the boundaries lie.

Most real-world conversations with AI will sit outside these narrow categories. So far OpenAI has not provided any details on which advertising categories will be included or excluded. However, if no restrictions were placed on the content of the ads, it's easy to picture that a user asking "how to wind down after a stressful day" might be shown alcohol delivery ads. A query about "fun weekend ideas" could surface gambling promotions.

Advertising incentives have a long record of undermining the public interest. The Cambridge Analytica scandal exposed how personal data collected for ads could be repurposed for political influence. The "Facebook files" revealed that Meta knew its platforms were causing serious harms, including to teenage mental health, but resisted changes that threatened advertising revenue.

More recent investigations show Meta continues to generate revenue from scam and fraudulent ads even after being warned about their harms.

WHY CHATBOTS RAISE THE STAKES

Chatbots are not merely another social media feed. People use them in intimate, personal ways for advice, emotional support and private reflection. These interactions feel discreet and non-judgmental, and often prompt disclosures people would not make publicly.

That trust amplifies persuasion in ways social media does not. People seek help and make decisions when they consult chatbots. Even with formal separation from responses, ads appear in a private, conversational setting rather than a public feed.

As OpenAI positions ChatGPT as a "super assistant" for everything from finances to health, the line between advice and persuasion blurs.

For scammers and autocrats, the appeal of a more powerful propaganda tool is clear. For AI providers, the financial incentives to accommodate them will be hard to resist.

The root problem is a structural conflict of interest. Advertising models reward platforms for maximising engagement, yet the content that best sustains attention is often misleading, emotionally charged or harmful to health. This is why voluntary restraint by online platforms has repeatedly failed.

IS THERE A BETTER WAY FORWARD?

One option is to treat AI as digital public infrastructure: these are essential systems designed to serve the public rather than maximise advertising revenue.

This need not exclude private firms. It requires at least one high-quality public option, democratically overseen – akin to public broadcasters alongside commercial media.

Switzerland developed the publicly funded AI system Apertus through its universities and national supercomputing centre. It is open source, compliant with European AI law, and free from advertising. Australia could go further.

Advertising did not corrupt social media overnight. It slowly changed incentives until public harm became the collateral damage of private profit. Bringing it into conversational AI risks repeating the mistake, this time in systems people trust far more deeply.

The key question is, should AI serve the public, or advertisers and investors? *—PTI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Ukrainians stranded in cold, dark houses as Russia targets power infra

Olena Janchuk spends another day of freezing isolation in her high-rise apartment.

The former kindergarten teacher suffers from severe rheumatoid arthritis, and has been trapped for weeks on the 19th floor of her Kyiv tower block, 650 steps from the ground.

Long daily blackouts caused by Russia's bombardment of power plants and transmission lines have made working elevators a luxury.

With January temperatures plummeting to -10 Celsius, there's a permanent line of frost on the inside of Janchuk's windows, white patterns creeping across the glass by morning.

The 53-year-old huddles over a makeshift fireplace of candles arranged beneath stacked bricks, designed to absorb and slowly release heat. USB charging cables snake across the floor from overloaded power strips, while her electric blanket is hooked up to a power bank rationed for the coldest hours.

"When there's no light and heat for seventeen and a half hours, you have to come up with something," she said. "The bricks work best in a small room, so we stay in there."

By day, the family shifts into rooms that catch the winter sun, the function of each space changing with the blackout schedule. At night, heavy clothes stay on indoors as the apartment cools rapidly without central heating.

Kyiv, a city of about 3 million people, is dominated by tower blocks, many from the Soviet era, now left without power for most of the day.

In this fourth winter of war, electricity is a rationed commodity.

Residents plan their lives around electricity schedules: when to cook, shower, charge phones and run washing machines. Food is chosen for shelf life, and water filtered into bottles and stored in buckets. Small camping gas burners are used to heat soup or tea when the power is out.

Sleep is fractured by air raid sirens and the need to use electricity during off-peak hours.

Outside, across snow-covered Kyiv, diesel generators rumble on commercial streets. Shoppers navigate aisles using phone flashlights, and bars glow by candlelight.

Apps notify users of narrowing electricity windows – usually just a few hours – enough for a household reboot.

Janchuk's 22-storey building is located near a power station and residents can see the missile and drone attacks firsthand, flashes lighting up the horizon at night.

People warm up and charge their mobile devices during a power outage caused by Russia's regular air attacks on the country's energy sector in Kyiv, Ukraine **PHOTO: PTI**

During blackouts, they climb the stairs in darkness, phone lights bouncing off concrete steps, often accompanied by the echo of children and barking dogs. People sometimes leave plastic bags with cookies or water inside elevators for those who get stuck when the power cuts mid-ride.

Janchuk's husband, out working most of the day, brings the groceries in the evening while her mother, 72-year-old Lyudmila Bachurina, is in charge of chores.

"It's cold, but we manage," the mother says, holding a square USB-charged flashlight she recently mounted on the wall. "When the lights come on, I start turning on the washing machine, fill up water bottles, cook food, charge power banks, run around the kitchen and run around the house."

In upscale neighbourhoods, residents pool funds for generators to keep elevators running. But most blocks – home to pensioners, families and people with disabilities – cannot afford them.

Disability advocates, including groups representing wounded war veterans, say staircases have become an invisible social barrier, cutting people off inside their own homes.

They are urging city officials to fund generators for residential buildings.

Until then, life bends around the electricity timetable. USB lamps, power banks and inverter batteries have become household staples. Telegram chats help neighbours check on the elderly and swap blackout updates.

From upper floors, Kyivans look out over a skyline of high rises and the city's historic golden-domed churches. At night, flashes of explosions are visible as Russia continues its campaign against Ukraine's energy system.

Too many power stations and transmission lines have been hit to meet demand, even with electricity imports from Europe. To prevent a grid collapse, operators impose rolling blackouts, keeping hospitals and critical services alive while homes go dark.

At one coal-fired power plant struck repeatedly, shift supervisor Yuriy walks through wreckage of charred machinery, collapsed roofs and control panels melted into useless lumps. Repairs are carried out by torchlight, giant sandbags shielding what still works. Photographs of colleagues killed on the job hang near the entrance.

"After missile and drone attacks, the consequences are terrible – large-scale," he said.

Officials asked that the plant's location and Yuriy's full name not be disclosed for security reasons.

"Our energy equipment has been destroyed. It is expensive," Yuriy said. "Right now, we're restoring what we can."

Ukraine's energy sector has suffered more than USD 20 billion in direct war damage, according to a joint estimate by the World Bank, European Commission and the United Nations.

Kyiv has repeatedly updated its austere winter power-saving schedule, dimming or cutting streetlights in low-traffic areas and investing in less centralised power generation.

In the tower blocks, restoration feels far off.

"I'm tired, really tired, to be honest. When you can't go outside, when you don't see the sun, when there's no light and you can't even go to the store on your own… it wears you down," Bachurina said. *—PTI*

Russia attacks Ukraine amid peace talks

One killed, 27 injured as drones rain on Ukrainian capital, and second largest city

A paramedic gives first aid to a resident who was injured in a Russian airstrike in Kharkiv, Ukraine **PHOTO: PTI**

KYIV, 24 JAN

Russian attacks on Ukraine killed at least one person and wounded 31 on Saturday as negotiators from Ukraine, Russia and the United States were to meet in the United Arab Emirates for a second day of talks to end Russia's nearly four-year full-scale invasion.

The talks are the first known instance that officials from the Trump administration have sat down with both countries as part of Washington's push for progress to end Moscow's nearly 4-year-old invasion.

One person was killed, and four were wounded in Russian drone attacks on the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, according to Kyiv City Military Administration head Tymur Tkachenko.

- "Cynically, Putin ordered a brutal, massive missile strike against Ukraine right while delegations are meeting in Abu Dhabi to advance the America-led peace process," said Ukraine's Foreign Minister.

In Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv, drone attacks wounded 27 people, Kharkiv regional head Oleh Syniehubov said Saturday.

The UAE's foreign ministry said the talks are part of efforts "to promote dialogue and identify political solutions to the crisis." The White House described Friday's first day as productive.

Following the latest attacks, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha slammed Russian President Vladimir Putin over the onslaught.

"Cynically, Putin ordered a brutal, massive missile strike against Ukraine right while delegations are meeting in Abu Dhabi to advance the America-led peace process," Sybiha wrote on X. "His missiles hit not only our people, but also the negotiation table."

There has been a flurry of diplomatic activity in recent days, from Switzerland to the Kremlin, even though serious obstacles remain between both sides.

While Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in Davos, Switzerland, on Thursday that a potential peace deal was "nearly ready," certain sensitive sticking points — most notably those related to territorial issues — remain unresolved.

Just hours before the talks began, Putin discussed a Ukraine settlement with US President Donald Trump's envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner during overnight talks. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Haiti crisis deepens as council ousts PM

PORT-AU-PRINCE, 24 JAN

Haiti's political turmoil deepened on Friday after a member of the country's transitional council announced that majority had voted to remove Prime Minister Alix Didier Fils-Aimé from office. Edgard Leblanc Fils made the announcement at a press conference alongside fellow council member Leslie Voltaire, despite calls from the United States to preserve stability in Haiti's leadership. Leblanc said the council plans to appoint a replacement prime minister within 30 days. However, it remains unclear whether council leader Laurent Saint-Cyr supports the decision. In a statement earlier this week, Saint-Cyr said he opposed any move that could destabilise the government ahead of 7 February, when the council will step down on a provisional basis. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Sudan sought sanctions after taking deportees

UBA, 24 JAN

After agreeing last year to accept deportees from the United States, South Sudan submitted requests to Washington including support for prosecuting an opposition leader and lifting sanctions on a senior official accused of diverting more than $1bn in public funds. The requests, revealed in State Department documents, show benefits sought by some governments. The US thanked South Sudan for accepting eight deportees of various nationalities. It was the first African country to take third-country deportees. The eight deportees to Sudan included nationals of Mexico, Cuba, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Sudan. *—PTI*

China will eat them: Trump as Canada opposes 'Golden dome'

WASHINGTON DC, 24 JAN

PHOTO: AI

US President Donald Trump on Friday slammed Canada for rejecting his proposed "Golden Dome" missile defence project over Greenland, warning that Beijing could "eat them up" the northern neighbour chooses closer ties with China over US-backed security.

On Truth Social, Trump wrote, "The Golden Dome would protect Canada. Instead, they voted in favour of doing business with China, who will 'eat them up' within the first year!"

Trump's outburst comes as US–Canada tensions rise after comments by Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney at the World Economic Forum in Davos, prompting Trump to accuse Canada of being insufficiently "grateful" for US security support..

"Canada lives because of the United States. Remember that, Mark, the next time you make your statements," Trump said, underscoring the strategic and security role of the US in protecting its northern neighbour.

Trump's remarks were aimed at Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, who, in his WEF address, highlighted "an era of great power rivalry, where the rules-based order is fading," and also opposed tariff coercion, in a veiled reference to Washington's use of the financial tool to acquire Greenland.

On 17 January, Carney announced a new trade deal with China, saying it would open more than USD 7 billion in export markets for Canadian workers and businesses. Under the agreement, Canada will cut its 100 per cent tariff on Chinese electric vehicles in exchange for lower Chinese tariffs on Canadian farm products. Carney also said China has become a more predictable partner than the United States. *—ANI*

US ship visits Cambodian base backed by China

REAM NAVAL BASE, 24 JAN

The USS Cincinnati docked at Cambodia's Ream Naval Base on Saturday, the first US warship to visit since the Chinese-funded renovation last year. Designed for near-shore operations, it can operate in very shallow waters. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet, says Ream is open to joint exercises with all allies. However, the new dock has raised concerns in the US that Chin, Cambodia's close ally, may be given exclusive access. The Cambodian government has denied this. *—PTI*

Pentagon to limit security support to US allies

ARLINGTON, 24, JAN

Under a new defence strategy, the Pentagon will offer limited support to US allies, shifting its focus to the security of the US and the West. The strategy argues Washington has long failed to prioritise the interests of Americans and should not equate distant threats with direct risks at home. It urges allies, particularly in Europe, to lead responses to threats more serious for them. The defense strategy backs Trump's calls burden-sharing, while rejecting isolationism claims. *—PTI*

Iran's Guard warns US, says force has its 'finger on trigger'

DUBAI, 24 JAN

Iran's Revolutionary Guard commander has warned the United States and Israel to avoid "any miscalculation", saying his forces are "more ready than ever, finger on the trigger", amid heightened regional tensions and the movement of US warships towards the Middle East.

Nournews, an outlet close to Iran's Supreme National Security Council, quoted Guard commander Gen Mohammad Pakpour as saying the force stood ready to execute orders from Iran's supreme leader. His remarks come after weeks of unrest in Iran and as Washington steps up its military presence in the region.

Tensions escalated following a nationwide crackdown on protests that erupted on December 28 over the collapse of Iran's currency, the rial. Demonstrations lasted about two weeks and were met with a heavy security response.

Mohammad Pakpour **PHOTO: PTI**

- Iran's Supreme National Security Council, quoted Guard commander Gen Mohammad Pakpour as saying the force stood ready to execute orders from Iran's supreme leader.

US President Donald Trump has repeatedly warned Tehran, setting red lines over the killing of peaceful protesters and the mass execution of detainees. Trump has claimed Iran halted plans to execute 800 people arrested during the unrest, a claim strongly denied by Iran's top prosecutor.

On Thursday, Trump said the US was moving warships towards Iran "just in case", confirming that the aircraft carrier USS Lincoln and accompanying vessels were in the Indian Ocean. He also warned that any future US strikes would dwarf earlier attacks on Iranian nuclear sites.

The tensions have disrupted air travel, with Air France temporarily suspending flights to Dubai and other European carriers cancelling services to the region. *—PTI*

US BOMBS 'TERRORIST' BOAT IN PACIFIC, 1 DEAD

WASHINGTON, 24 JAN

President Donald Trump's administration has announced in Friday a boat strike in international waters, killing two people in the eastern Pacific. "On 23 January, acting on Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's orders, Joint Task Force Southern Spear carried out a lethal strike on a vessel run by alleged terrorists, after intelligence confirmed it was using known Eastern Pacific narco-trafficking routes." the command said . This attack brings the total number of strikes since Trump launched his campaign in September to at least 36. Including the latest two deaths, around 125 people are estimated to have been killed in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific. *—Agencies*

China's top 2 military officials under probe

BEIJING, 24 JAN

Two senior Chinese military officials, including the highest-ranking PLA officer Gen Zhang Youxia, are under investigation for serious violations of the Communist Party's discipline and laws, the Defence Ministry announced on Saturday.

Gen Zhang, Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), is the top military figure in China, heading the country's military under President Xi Jinping. His role makes him the highest-ranking uniformed officer in the PLA.

The other official under investigation is General Liu Zhenli, a CMC member and chief of staff of the Joint Staff Department. "After deliberation by the CPC Central Committee, it was decided to initiate an investigation into Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli," the Ministry said.

The probe, especially against Zhang, has caused shock within the Chinese military.

Zhang is also a member of the 24-man Politburo of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Since Xi Jinping's rise in 2012, dozens of senior PLA officers have been sacked or disciplined in an anti-corruption campaign targeting "tigers and flies".

Last October, He Weidong, the second-ranked military official of the CMC, was expelled from the party and armed forces. The previous month, Wang Renhua, Zhang Hongbing, and Wang Peng were expelled. *—PTI*

8,000 flights cancelled as major winter storm bears down on US

DALLAS, 24 JAN

Strong winds kick up snow in Lowville, New York **PHOTO: ANI**

Over 8,000 flights across the US are set to be cancelled this weekend as a severe winter storm causes widespread disruption, power outages, and dangerous road conditions. Around 140 million people from New Mexico to New England are under storm warnings, with catastrophic ice from east Texas to North Carolina. Damage could rival that of a hurricane, especially in ice-affected areas.

By Friday night, freezing rain and sleet impacted Texas, while Oklahoma experienced snow and sleet. The storm is forecast to move into the Northeast, bringing about a foot of snow to Washington, New York, and Boston. Governors in over a dozen states declared emergencies or urged residents to stay home. Texas Governor Greg Abbott advised, "Stay home if possible," as the Department of Transport pretreated roads.

More than 3,400 flights were delayed or cancelled on Saturday, with over 5,000 called off on Sunday. Angela Exstrom's flight from Houston to Omaha was cancelled, and she rerouted via Los Angeles. Utility companies prepared for power outages, with Midwest wind chills plunging to minus 40°C. *—PTI*

2-year-old girl taken by ICE in Minneapolis

MINNEAPOLIS, 24 JAN

A two-year-old girl and her father were detained by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in south Minneapolis on Thursday, according to a city councillor. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) confirmed Elvis Joel Tipan-Echeverria was arrested while driving with the child, whose details were not disclosed.

City Council member Jason Chavez alleged a "suspicious vehicle" followed the father home, broke his window and detained both without presenting a judicial warrant. He said he met the family later that evening.

DHS said Tipan-Echeverria, an undocumented immigrant from Ecuador, had committed felony re-entry and other immigration violations. The agency said he was driving erratically with a child and refused lawful commands during the arrest. It added the child was taken into care after the mother declined custody, and both are now at a DHS facility.

said about 120 bystanders blocked agents, throwing rocks and bins, prompting better crowd-control measured. *—Agencies*

OVER FAMILY DISPUTE

Indian man kills wife, 3 relatives in US

NEW YORK, 24 JAN

An Indian-origin man has been arrested in the US state of Georgia for allegedly shooting his wife and three relatives dead following a family dispute, police said.

Vijay Kumar was taken into custody from Lawrenceville city early on Friday, Gwinnett County Police confirmed. Officers had been dispatched to the 1000 block of Brook Ivy Court at about 2.30 am after receiving reports of shots fired inside a home.

On arrival, police found four adults dead from apparent gunshot wounds. The victims were identified as Kumar's wife, Meemu Dogra, 43, an Indian national, and three relatives — Gourav Cumar, 33, Nidhi Chander, 37, and Harish Chander, 38 — who lived at the Brook Ivy Court address.

Police said an argument had begun between Kumar and Dogra at their home in Atlanta. The couple then travelled with their 12-year-old child to the relatives' residence, where the shooting later occurred. Two other children, aged seven and 10, were also inside the home at the time. All three children were found unharmed, hiding in a closet.

Kumar's child called 911 after the incident, police said. Authorities added that it remains unclear what the argument was about or what led to the shooting.

Kumar has been charged with four counts of aggravated assault, felony murder and malice murder, first-degree cruelty to children and two counts of third-degree cruelty to children. Police said the motive remains under investigation but appears to be domestic-related. *—PTI*

Java landslide kills eight, 82 missing

JAKARTA, 24 JAN

A landslide caused by heavy rains on Indonesia's main island of Java has killed at least eight people and left 82 missing, as rescuers battled deep mud to find survivors. The disaster struck in Pasir Langu village, West Bandung district, West Java, after days of torrential rain, caused the burying of around 34 houses.

Of the 82 residents 24 have managed to escape. The worst-hit hamlet, Pasir Kuning, saw eight bodies recovered.

Footage showed workers and villagers digging desperately in Pasir Langu, where roads and rice terraces were transformed into muddy wastelands. "Unstable soil and heavy rain continue to complicate search and rescue operations," said Teten Ali Mungku Engkun, head of West Java's Disaster Management Office.

Environmentalists and experts have pointed how forest loss effected the landslides that washed torrents of mud into villages **PHOTO:X**

Local authorities quickly assessed the damage and evacuated families within 100 metres of the landslide zone. Residents in vulnerable areas are urged to remain vigilant and evacuate at signs of soil movement. Indonesia's seasonal rains frequently cause flooding and landslides, with last December's floods in Sumatra killing over 1,200 people. *—PTI*

Adani invests Rs 30K cr in Vizhinjam port

CM inaugurates 2nd phase of the port, says it will be the largest shipment hub of India

Adani Ports will add 4.1 million twenty-footequivalent units to the existing capacity of the seaport. The phase 2 development of the seaport will be undertaken with updated automation in technologies and equipment ***PHOTO: X***

T'PURAM, 24 JAN

Karan Adani, managing director of Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ) on Saturday said the company will invest Rs 30,000 crore in the development of the Vizhinjam seaport.

Along with the additional investment of Rs 16,000 crore under phase 2 and a cumulative commitment of Rs 30,000 crore, the port's capacity will be increased from 1 million Twenty lakh equivalent units (TEUs) to 5.7 million TEUs by 2029.

According to him, apart from being the largest transshipment port, Vizhinjam will also be the most technologically advanced port in India.

He also acknowledged the role played by late Kerala CM Oommen Chandy and his successor Pinarayi Vijayan in making the project a success.

"This continuity of vision has been carried forward with exceptional resolve under the leadership of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. Large, transformational infrastructure projects succeed not only because of engineering excellence, but because of political clarity, administrative discipline, and long-term commitment" he said.

He further said that Vijayan's consistent support for Vizhinjam has been central to transforming "a long-standing aspiration into a nationally and globally significant maritime asset".

Inaugurating the phase 2 development of the port, Vijayan said that once the second phase development of Vizhinjam seaport is completed, it will become an international transhipment hub and an important centre on the global maritime trade map. He said said the message it was sending to the world was that Kerala was "changing and moving forward".

"The time we depended on others for the movement of goods is over," he said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: AI

India unveils 'techno-legal' rules to boost AI

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

India's Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser has released a white paper on AI governance, proposing a "techno-legal" framework to balance innovation and risk. The framework integrates legal safeguards, technical controls, and institutional mechanisms to ensure trusted AI development. 'Strengthening AI Governance Through Techno-Legal Framework' outlines a comprehensive institutional mechanism to operationalise India's AI governance ecosystem. The proposed framework aims to strengthen the broader AI governance ecosystem comprising industry, academia, government, AI model developers, deployers, and AI users. The AI Governance Group, will coordinate between various ministries, regulators and policy advisory. *—ANI*

B'luru's young buyers drive sales of Mercedes-Benz

BENGALURU 24 JAN

The average age of a Mercedes-Benz buyer in India has dropped from 42 to 38, but in Bengaluru, "38% of customers are under 38 years old". Stating this at the launch of a new Mercedes-Benz facility in the city, Santosh Iyer, Managing Director and CEO of Mercedes-Benz India, attributed the emerging trend to a robust accumulation of wealth among the city's young professionals and entrepreneurs. He said, adding that the city's rising contribution to national GDP has been contributing to the rising number of wealthy millennials driving the demand for Mercedes-Benz, a shift away from the traditional older demographic associated with high-end vehicles. Iyer said the German automaker seeks to tap into this localised wealth. *—ANI*

Kotak Bank Q3 profit rises 4% at Rs 3,446 cr

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Kotak Mahindra Bank on Saturday reported a 4 per cent increase in standalone net profit at Rs 3,446 crore for the third quarter ended December 2025. The Mumbai-based private sector lender had earned a net profit of Rs 3,305 crore in the year-ago period. Total income rose to Rs 16,741 crore during the quarter under review from Rs 16,050 crore in the same period last year, Kotak Mahindra Bank said in a regulatory filing. The bank's interest income also grew to Rs 13,903 crore, as against Rs 13,428 crore a year ago. Net Interest Income (NII) in Q3FY26 increased to Rs 7,565 crore from Rs 7,196 crore a year ago. *—PTI*

UltraTech Cement Q3 profits reach Rs 1,729.44 crore

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

UltraTech Cement, India's leading cement maker on Saturday reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 1,729.44 crore for December quarter FY26. It had posted a net profit of Rs 1,363.44 crore in the October-December period a year ago, the Aditya Birla group flagship firm said in a regulatory filing. The revenue from operations was at Rs 21,829.68 crore in the December quarter of FY26. It was at Rs 17,778.83 crore a year earlier. UltraTech's total consolidated income, which includes other income as well, was at Rs 21,965.26 crore in the December quarter. Sales volume was up 15 per cent to 33.85 metric tonne. Its domestic grey cement production was at 36.37 MT, up 15.4 per cent in December quarter. Its sales realisation declined 0.4 per cent YoY and 3.3 *per cent QoQ.—PTI*

AI to operate Boeing 787-9 with restraints; awaits nod from FDA

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN:

Air India will operate its new Boeing 787-9 aircraft with certain limitations as the airline is awaiting approvals from US' Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) for the sliding privacy doors and economy class seats.

The first custom-made Dreamliner to join the Air India fleet after takeover by the Tata Group in January 2022, will enter commercial operations on the Mumbai-Frankfurt route from 1 February.

The plane has 296 seats, comprising 30 business class, 28 premium economy and 238 economy class seats, of which 18 seats will not be available for use till FAA gives its approval.

"The sliding privacy doors in our business class suites will remain securely fixed in the open position and unavailable for passenger use, as this specific seat feature awaits regulatory approval," an Air India official said.

In 2026, five more wide-body aircraft -- three Boeing 787-9s and 2 A350-1000s -- are set to join the Air India fleet, the official further said.

The airline currently has 188 planes and the legacy Boeing 787s are undergoing retrofit progressively.

The certifications for seats and features on the B787-8 are complete and have been approved by relevant regulators and will be available for customer use, the airline stated.

At present, Air India has 33 Boeing 787s -- 26 legacy Boeing 787-8s and 7 Boeing 787-9s, including 6 from Vistara and the new one. *—PTI*

IndiGo vacates 717 airport slots as DCGA curtails flights

MUMBAI, 24 JAN

IndiGo has vacated more than 700 slots at various domestic airports, following aviation watchdog DGCA curtailing the country's largest airline's winter flights by 10 per cent after massive operational disruptions in early December.

Out of the 717 slots, as many as 364 are from six key metro airports -- Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Hyderabad.

Among these cities, most of the vacated slots are from Hyderabad and Bengaluru, the sources said.

As per data provided by the sources, the number of slots vacated by IndiGo is spread over the January-March period. A total of 361 slots have been vacated for March compared to just 43 for February, and this month, the count of vacated slots is at 361.

Against this backdrop, the civil aviation ministry on Thursday asked other airlines to submit their requests for operating domestic flights on the slots vacated by IndiGo.

"IndiGo has submitted a list of 717 slots to the ministry, which it has vacated after the domestic winter schedule was reduced by 10 per cent in early December last year," one of the sources said.

An airline industry executive said airlines might not be keen to take the slots vacated by IndiGo, as most of them are for red-eye flights, meaning those operated late at night or in the wee hours. *—PTI*

WB reins in revenue spending growth in FY-26: Report

KOLKATA, 24 JAN

West Bengal has managed to keep its revenue expenditure growth under tight control in the first eight months of the 2025-26 fiscal, even as several states grappled with elevated spending pressure, according to a report by CareEdge Ratings on states' April-November finances. The eastern state's revenue expenditure rose by just 3.8 per cent year-on-year, a sharp moderation from the 16.1-per cent growth recorded in the corresponding period of the previous fiscal, as per the agency's analysis.

West Bengal accounted for 6.2 per cent of the revenue expenditure of 22 states analysed, indicating a restrained spending profile. *—PTI*

States' fiscal deficit rises to 3.3% in 24-25: RBI

MUMBAI, 24 JAN

States' consolidated gross fiscal deficit increased to 3.3 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2024-25, Reserve Bank's annual publication "State Finances: A Study of Budgets" noted.

The theme of this year's report was 'Demographic Transition in India - Implications for State Finances'

The deficit of states exceeding 3 per cent mainly reflects 50-year interest-free loans from the Centre under the Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment, which is over and above the States' normal net borrowing ceiling.

For 2025-26, states have budgeted gross fiscal deficit at 3.3 per cent of GDP while improving the composition of spending by restraining revenue expenditure.

The RBI report noted that the consolidated outstanding liabilities of States declined to 28.1 per cent of GDP at end-March 2024, from a peak of 31 per cent at end-March 2021.

The outstanding liabilities are budgeted to increase to 29.2 per cent of GDP by end-March 2026.

The RBI report further noted that states in India are at different stages of demographic transition,

While youthful states may harness their demographic dividend by strengthening human capital, intermediate states may balance growth priorities with early preparation for ageing. Ageing states may enhance revenue capacity, healthcare, pension and workforce policy reforms. *—ANI*

BEST SPEECH QUALITY TOO

JIO tops mobile data download speed: TRAI

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Reliance Jio Infocomm Limited (RJIL) has emerged as a leader in voice and data performance across the national capital.

According to the latest Independent Drive Test (IDT) report by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), which assesses network quality across the Delhi Licensed Service Area (LSA), RJIL delivered the highest download speeds and superior speech quality among major telecom service providers during the December 2025 testing period.

The drive tests were conducted between December 15 and December 18, 2025, covering 347.4 km of city routes and 12 hotspot locations, a TRAI press release said.

The assessment evaluated 2G, 3G, 4G, and 5G technologies to capture real-world mobile network performance in diverse environments, including urban zones, institutional hotspots, and high-speed corridors.

In the voice services category, RJIL recorded a Call Setup Success Rate (CSSR) of 98.36 per cent and attained the highest Mean Opinion Score (MOS) of 4.44, a key indicator of speech quality.

Bharti Airtel achieved a perfect 100 per cent CSSR, while Vodafone Idea (VIL) and MTNL reported rates of 99.64 per cent and 95.23 per cent, respectively. *—ANI*

Republic Day sparks boom in travel

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

The Republic Day long weekend, starting Saturday, is sparking a surge in travel, with hotels and resorts reporting rising bookings, industry experts said.

Short, experience-led holidays, or "micro-getaways," are emerging as a strong trend among Indian travellers. Destinations with direct flights, such as Goa, Thailand, and Vietnam, are seeing high demand.

KB Kachru, President of the Hotel Association of India, highlighted growing interest in wellness stays, curated local experiences, and flexible bookings, particularly from urban travellers seeking quick escapes. Rajesh Magow, Co-founder of MakeMyTrip, noted that nearby destinations remain popular, with Goa leading domestically, while internationally, easy-visa countries with multiple city connectivity, such as Thailand and Vietnam, are favoured.

Nikhil Sharma of Radisson Hotels and Madhav Sehgal of The Leela Palaces observed last-minute bookings and personalised experiences on the rise. Arjun Baljee of Royal Orchid Hotels said most reservations now occur within 7–10 days, reflecting a preference for flexibility and spontaneous travel decisions.

There is a growing interest in wellness stays, curated local experiences and flexible booking among urban travellers ***PHOTO: ANI***

Madhav Sehgal - Senior Vice President Operations (South India) and Head of Sales at The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts, highlighted that the rise of micro-getaways has emerged as a core leisure trend shaping long-weekend travel across markets.

Rahool Macarius, Market Managing Director, Eurasia, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts said: "We are witnessing an unprecedented surge in travel demand as the upcoming extended weekend approaches. Leisure destinations like Kochi, are experiencing a remarkable influx of travellers from the cities. *—PTI*

INOXGFL to invest Rs 17,000 cr in renewable energy

NEW DELHI/DAVOS, 24 JAN

INOXGFL Group has signed three MoUs worth Rs 17,000 crore with Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Kerala governments to invest in the renewable energy space.

The memorandums of understanding (MoUs) were signed on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum (WEF) summit in Davos, Switzerland, on Friday.

As per the MoUs, INOXGFL Group will set up solar power projects, cells and modules manufacturing plants as well as solar module testing laboratories in the states, a company official said.

With the Uttar Pradesh government, the group signed an initial agreement worth Rs 10,500 crore, and MoUs worth Rs 6,500 crore were signed with Assam and Kerala collectively, the company official said, wishing not to be quoted.

Devansh Jain, Executive Director, INOXGFL Group, said, "India is emerging as a global leader in the renewable energy spectrum, and we will continue to contribute to lead this journey. These investments reflect our strong conviction in India's long-term growth story, our commitment to strengthening domestic manufacturing, and our belief that scale, sustainability, and self-reliance must progress together." *—PTI*

AHEAD OF US TRIAL

Meta temporarily halts teens' access to AI characters

SAN FRANCISCO, 24 JAN

Meta is halting teens' access to artificial intelligence characters, at least temporarily, the company said in a blog post Friday.

Meta Platforms Inc, which own Instagram and WhatsApp, said that starting in the "coming weeks," teens will no longer be able to access AI characters "until the updated experience is ready"

This applies to anyone who gave Meta a birthday that makes them a minor, as well as "people who claim to be adults but who we suspect are teens based on our age prediction technology."

The move comes the week before Meta — along with TikTok and Google's YouTube — is scheduled to stand trial in Los Angeles over its apps' harms to children.

Teens will still be able to access Meta's AI assistant, just not the characters.

- Meta Platforms Inc, in the coming weeks said that teens will be unable to access AI characters "until the updated experience is ready."

Other companies have also banned teens from AI chatbots amid growing concerns about the effects of artificial intelligence conversations on children.

Character.AI announced its ban last fall. That company is facing several lawsuits over child safety, including one filed by the mother of a teenager who had claimed the company's chatbots pushed her teenage son to kill himself. *—PTI*

Goldman Sachs CEO's salary rises 21% to $47M

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Goldman Sachs Group Inc. CEO David Solomon saw his biggest pay hike, as his compensation for 2025 jumped by 21 per cent to $47 million, according to a Bloomberg report.

The hike comes as Goldman Sachs stocks soared amid his leadership. The compensation comprised $2 million as base salary and $45 million of bonus (including cash, carried interest, and shares), a company filing with the United States Securities and Exchange Commission stated.

Solomon beat JPMorgan Chase's CEO Jamie Dimon's salary for 2025, which rose 10.3 per cent to $43 million. Both Solomon and Dimon earned $39 million in 2024.

Goldman's profits in Q4 was driven by a surge in deal making and trading. In 2025, the stock rose to about 54 per cent, leaping ahead of Morgan Stanley and JPMorgan.

It also comes after Solomon and Goldman Sachs President John Waldron's $80 million retention awards were approved by a shareholder vote in April. These shares will vest in January 2030. Solomon, 64, joined Goldman Sachs as a partner in 1999 and rose through the ranks to succeed Lloyd Blankfein in 2018. *—Agencies*

PHOTO: PTI

MS Dhoni begins IPL 2026 preparations

RANCHI, 24 JAN

Former India and Chennai Super Kings captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni returned to training on Saturday, fuelling speculation that he has started preparations for the IPL 2026.Jharkhand State Cricket Association (JSCA) shared a short clip of Dhoni being padded up for a net session with the caption 'Look who is back', in a social media post."Pride of JSCA: Mahendra Singh Dhoni", said the caption of the video post.Dhoni was seen chatting with former India batter and JSCA official Saurabh Tiwary before the nets.The window for the IPL 2026, meanwhile, has been fixed from26 March to 31 May.Having retired from international cricket in 2020, Dhoni continues to feature only in the IPL. CSK is now led by Ruturaj Gaikwad, but Dhoni remains an essential part of the team. —*PTI*

IPL Governing Council to decide RCB's home games

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

The Indian Premier League (IPL) Governing Council is expected to meet next week to decide whether Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) will be able to play its home games at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium this season. Despite the Karnataka State government clearing the decks for the venue to host IPL and international matches, some 'grey areas' remain, with the franchise required to fulfil a few criteria before the ball can get rolling. The Board, meanwhile, has requested the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) to follow up on the matter with the State government."We had a recent meeting in which we could not finalise whether RCB will be playing in Bengaluru or not.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Atiqa joins world Karting champions Modena for WSK

LA CONCA, 24 JAN

Indian racing prodigy Atiqa Mir has secured a coveted drive for reigning world champions Modena Racing Team for the 2026 season of the prestigious WSK championship, considered as the 'Formula 1' of karting. Atiqa, all of 11, has taken the tougher route to the top by opting to race in the highly competitive junior category (age 12-14) this season. On the back of her impressive performances in the mini category (age 8-12) last year, the Formula 1 Academy supported driver was signed for the entire season and will drive in the WSK Super Master Series, WSK Euro Series, WSK Final Cup, amongst other championships. In the process, Atiqa will become the first Indian female ever to drive in the OKNJ category in WSK and, remarkably, will be the only female.—*PTI*

Kothari retains billiards title with emotional win

BAHADURGARH, 24 JAN

Encouraged by his family to compete at the premier National Championships soon after the passing of his father, Sourav Kothari produced a deeply emotional performance to retain the senior men's billiards title with a commanding 4-0 win over Shrikrishna here on Saturday.As he potted the red into the centre pocket in the fourth frame to seal victory, Sourav looked heavenwards and appeared to gesture that the triumph was dedicated to his late father Manoj Kothari.—*PTI*

Djokovic soars to 400 Grand Slam wins at AO

Podcast pals Keys and Pegula set to play 4th round

MELBOURNE, 24 JAN

Novak Djokovic escaped the heat and doused Dutchman Botic van de Zandschulp 6-3, 6-4, 7-6(4) at the Australian Open on Saturday to reach the fourth round and add another line in the record book during his bid for a standalone 25th Grand Slam title.

With his 102nd match victory at Melbourne, the evergreen Serb equalled six-time champion Roger Federer's record at the year's first Major and also became the first player to secure 400 wins at the Grand Slams.

"I feel really good. It's been a great start," the 10-times Melbourne Park champion declared.

"Things can change, and I'm not getting ahead of myself, because last year I learned a lesson, I got too excited too early in some of the Slams, playing well and getting to the quarterfinals and semifinals, and then getting injured.

Sinner fights cramps to keep title defence alive

Jannik Sinner on Saturday battled back from the brink of a cramp-induced breakdown to keep his Australian Open title defence alive after extreme heat brought play to a halt on baking outdoor courts at Melbourne Park. In a dramatic third-round match, Italian Sinner lost his first set since October against inspired American Eliot Spizzirri and was a limping wreck under a blazing sun at Rod Laver Arena. However, the match swung in his favour when the tournament invoked its extreme heat policy, allowing the stadium's roof to shut and Sinner to rally for a dramatic 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 win.

Naomi Osaka withdraws because of an injury

Naomi Osaka withdrew from the Australian Open on Saturday before her scheduled third-round match against Australian qualifier Maddison Inglis on Saturday, ending a campaign noted strikingly for fashion and friction.

The two-time Australian Open champion announced it on social media without divulging her injury, posting on Instagram that she had to withdraw "to address something my body needs attention for after my last match."

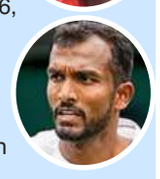
Podcast pals Keys and Pegula set to play 4th round

Whatever happens in a fourth-round match between defending champion Madison Keys and fellow American Jessica Pegula at the Australian Open, Keys has already nailed the promo for it.

The close friends advanced to the fourth round with wins on Saturday.

The ninth-seeded Keys beat Karolina Pliskova 6-3, 6-3 in the opening match on Rod Laver Arena, and sixth-seeded Pegula defeated Oksana Selekhmeteva 6-3, 6-2 at Margaret Court Arena. —*PTI*

Bhambri advances, Balaji ousted



India's Yuki Bhambri advanced to the third round of the men's doubles at the Australian Open on Saturday, while compatriot N. Sriram Balaji bowed out, marking a mixed day for the Indian contingent at the season's first Grand Slam. Bhambri and his 10th-seeded Swedish partner Andre Goransson overcame the unseeded pairing of Santiago Gonzalez and David Pel 4-6, 7-6(5), 6-3 in a second-round contest that was interrupted by the tournament's extreme heat policy. The match, which lasted two hours and six minutes in total, had been suspended on Thursday with Bhambri and Goransson trailing 4-6, 2-2 before resuming later as per Australian Open regulations.

INDIA LOOK TO SEAL SERIES

Ishan's comeback puts Sanju Samson under pressure

GUWAHATI, 24 JAN

Ishan Kishan's sensational comeback will reignite debate over who should be Abhishek Sharma's preferred opening partner with Sanju Samson's increasing struggles as the hosts look to seal the five-match T20 series in the third game here on Sunday.

With just two weeks and three matches against New Zealand in the ongoing series left before the start of their T20 World Cup title defence, India's combination looks largely settled.

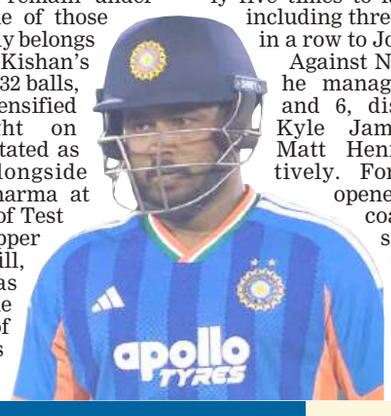
The batting and bowling units appear sorted, and only a few spots remain under scrutiny. One of those slots currently belongs to Samson. Kishan's superb 76 off 32 balls, however, intensified the spotlight on Sanju. Reinstated as opener alongside Abhishek Sharma at the expense of Test and ODI skipper Shubman Gill, Samson has failed to make the most of his chances and has played quite a lot of games.

Gill, despite his technical solidity, struggled to make an impact in T20Is and was sidelined in a bold call to accommodate Sanju, who had scored three centuries in five matches late last year.

But back in his preferred slot, the Kerala man has not delivered, and time is running out with hardly any turnaround time before the T20 World Cup, as the series would be a make-or-break for him. His vulnerability against express pace has once again resurfaced.

During the England series earlier this year, he fell cheaply five times to fast bowlers, including three dismissals in a row to Jofra Archer.

Against New Zealand, he managed only 10 and 6, dismissed by Kyle Jamieson and Matt Henry, respectively. Former India opener and noted coach Raman summed it up on social media after his Raipur dismissal. —*PTI*



INDIA VS NEW ZEALAND T20I

INDIA vs NEW ZEALAND
Match starts in Guwahati
@7 pm IST

HEAD TO HEAD GUWAHATI

PLAYED:	26
INDIA WON:	15
NZ WON:	10
TIED	1

West Ham survival push in win over Sunderland

LONDON, 24 JAN

West Ham United's Jarrod Bowen wrote himself into the club's history books while inspiring a rampant first-half display as they secured a vital 3-1 home victory over Sunderland on Saturday to inch closer to the Premier League safety zone.

West Ham have won their last three matches in all competitions, including 2-1 wins over Queens Park Rangers in the FA Cup and Tottenham Hotspur in the league.

They are 18th with 20 points from 23 games, two behind Nottingham Forest, who travel to Brentford on Sunday. Sunderland are ninth on 33 points, three points off the top four.

"The message before the game was just keep building on what we've been doing," Bowen told Premier League Productions.

"Winning any football game gives you confidence, and doing that against QPR, then going to Tottenham, we felt like we were in a good place."

The hosts took the lead at London Stadium in the 14th minute when Bowen's lofted cross into Sunderland's penalty area was headed home by Crysencio Summerville.

Bowen doubled West Ham's advantage after converting a spot kick following Trai Hume's foul on Ollie Scarles, with Mateus Fernandes adding a third just before halftime with a brilliant strike from long range. —*PTI*

Inexplicable blunder causes Gukesh's loss

WIJK AAN ZEE, 24 JAN

World champion D Gukesh was himself to blame as he fell into a blind spot and made an unimaginable blunder to go down to Nodirbek Abdusatorov of Uzbekistan in a sixth-round match of the Tata Steel chess tournament here on Saturday.

Top-seeded Indian Grand master Arjun Erigaisi, meanwhile, benefitted from a similar oversight by Matthias Bluebaum of Germany to salvage half a point.On a day filled with drama, Indian GM Gukesh blundered almost with a blind eye and had to resign immediately in a position he would have survived with a possible draw.

It's very clear what is referred to as a blind spot in chess when, at a given moment, the player is not able to recognise for a few seconds what's happening. While this was the first instance for Gukesh to go through this after becoming a Grandmaster, his fans and followers would hope that it was also the last time.

Arjun, on the other hand, was dead lost against Bluebaum, the German who surprised everyone by qualifying for the Candidates tournament later this year. —*PTI*

AFTER BANGLADESH OUSTER

Government will decide on T20 WC participation: Naqvi

LAHORE, 24 JAN

PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi on Saturday said the Pakistan government will take the final and binding decision on whether its national team will participate in the upcoming T20 World Cup, following Bangladesh's removal from the tournament.

Addressing a press conference here, Naqvi said the matter would be placed before Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, who is currently out of the country, once he returns.

"Whether we play in the T20 World Cup or not, the decision will be taken by the government," Naqvi said.

"Our PM (Shahbaz Sharif) is out of the country. When he comes, we will take advice from him. The decision by the government will be final and binding, and if they say no, then they (ICC) may invite any other team."

Bangladesh lost its place in the T20 World Cup after refusing to travel to India, citing security reasons, a move that prompted the International Cricket Council (ICC) to replace them with Scotland.

Pakistan is scheduled to play all its matches in Sri Lanka as per an agreement with the BCCI.

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) was the only member nation to support Bangladesh in their demand to move their matches to Sri Lanka, as 14 others voted against it.

Naqvi said Bangladesh, which he described as a "big stakeholder" in world cricket, had been unfairly treated by the ICC.

"Bangladesh is a big stakeholder, and they have been unfairly treated in this case. This I maintained in Wednesday's meeting as well, and their stance has many factors which I will tell when the situation arrives," he said.

The PCB chairman also questioned what he termed selective decision-making by the global body, alleging that "one member nation" was exerting undue influence.

"One country is dictating. When the ICC changed venues for Pakistan and India in favour, then why was it not done for Bangladesh?" asked Naqvi.

"Our policy and position are clear when the time comes, and the government makes a decision, and everyone will know about it. We are not under the ICC; we are subservient to our government. Once the PM returns, he will decide. We will follow government directives." —*PTI*

RAMPANT INDIA CRUSH NEW ZEALAND BY 7 WICKETS IN U-19 WORLD CUP

BULAWAYO, 24 JAN

Skipper Ayush Mhatre's 27-ball 53 underlined India's another dominant show as they notched a crushing seven-wicket victory via DLS method over New Zealand in the U-19 World Cup here on Saturday.

An all-round India won a truncated game of 37-overs-per-side with complete ease, stamping their authority in the competition with another big victory.Chasing a revised target of 130, India made 130 for three in a mere 13.3 overs to record their third consecutive win and top Group B.RS Ambrish (8-1-29-4) and Henil Patel (7.2-1-23-3) led the bowling charge early for India, who had asked New Zealand to bat first in the damp conditions of the rain-truncated game.

New Zealand were reduced to 69 for 7 as Indian bowlers continued to strike right from the word go, and eventually bowled the Kiwis out for 135 in 36.2 overs.Snehith Reddy (10) was the only New Zealand batter among the top five to score in double digits.

Brief Scores:
New Zealand: 135 all out in 36.2 overs (Callum Samson 37; RS Ambrish 4/29, Henil Patel 3/23).
India: 130 for 3 in 13.3 overs (Vaibhav Sooryavanshi 40, Ayush Mhatre 53; Selwin Sanjay 1/22). —*PTI*

WOMEN'S ASIA CUP 2026

India named Radha Yadav captain

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Radha Yadav will lead India A at the Rising Star Asia Cup next month, with the squad announced by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Saturday.

India A, the defending champion, is drawn with Pakistan A, Nepal and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and starts the campaign against UAE on February 13.

It is the second edition of the tournament, with the previous inaugural edition played in Hong Kong three years ago.

Though Deeya and Mamta have been named in the squad, both are subject to clearance from the BCCI Centre of Excellence.

Humairaa Kaazi, Vrinda Dinesh, Anushka Sharma, Deeya Yadav, Tejal Hasabnis, Nandani Kashyap (wk), Mamta M (wk), Radha Yadav (c), Sonia Mendhiya, Minnu Mani, Tanuja Kanwer, Prema Rawat, Saima Thakor, Jintamani Kalita, Nandani Sharma.

India Women's tour of Australia

India's World Cup-winning star Pratika Rawal, along with left-arm spinner Vaishnavi Sharma and seamer Kranti Gaud, received their maiden long-format call-ups for the one-off Test against Australia to be held at Perth from 6 to 9 March.

The 15-member squad will be led by Harmanpreet Kaur, and the Test will follow the white-ball format matches (3 T20Is, 3 ODIs), beginning from 15 February.

Pratika's inclusion was a formality after her stirring efforts in the ODIs, 1110 runs from 24 matches at an average of 50.45 with two hundreds and seven fifties.

It also meant that the opening batter had sufficiently recovered from the ankle injury that forced her to sit out of last year's women's ODI World Cup semifinal and final. —*PTI*

Radha Yadav PHOTO: PTI

FIFA to pay first Women's CC winner a record $2.3M

ZURICH, 24 JAN

FIFA will pay $2.3 million in prize money to the club that wins the first Women's Champions Cup at Arsenal's stadium next week.

The total fund detailed on Friday by FIFA will share $3.9 million among the six continental champions. The final stages in London are a warm-up for a planned full Women's Club World Cup in 2028.

European champion Arsenal will play ASFAR of Morocco after Gotham from the United States plays Corinthians of Brazil in back-to-back semifinals on Wednesday at the home of Premier League club Brentford.

The final at Arsenal's stadium on Feb. 1 will follow a third-place game at the same venue.

The champion gets $2.3 million and the beaten finalist $1 million, with $200,000 paid to each of the losing semifinalists.

Two continental champions already eliminated in earlier rounds Auckland United from Oceania and Wuhan Chegu Jiangda representing Asia each get $100,000. —*PTI*